

6<sup>th</sup> September, 2010

**RESEARCH REPORT  
MA PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH**

# **FACING “THE BOOK”**

*Investigating the discursive construction of Facebook through multiple modalities and the consequent construction of ideology.*

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It is the pervading law of all things organic and  
inorganic,  
Of all things physical and metaphysical,  
Of all things human and all things super-human,  
Of all true manifestations of the head,  
Of the heart, of the soul,  
That the life is recognizable in its expression,  
That form ever follows function. This is the  
law.

*~Louis Sullivan*

*Dedication*

To my dad Domenico: may your love, support and pride live on in these pages; you will be forever missed.

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# Chapter 1

## RATIONALE

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There is no doubt that avenues of communication have dramatically changed during the past century (Cachia, Compañó, & Costa, 2007). The introduction of the telegraph and telephone brought with them the possibility of communicating over long distances and began fashioning a world where physical space and distance are seemingly irrelevant. In that it provides one of the most current examples of the possible direction communication and indeed, social interaction, is taking Facebook can be understood as a microcosm of the technological revolution we are currently experiencing.

What originally started as a means to connect American college students has grown into one of the largest online social networks in the world (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Growth aside, it took a mere four years for this to happen. The very rate at which technology is progressing suggests that it is now ready for immediate consumption upon its release. Although this is not universally true in all contexts or countries, there is undoubtedly a market for high-end technologically fuelled products and one must therefore question whether this trend may in fact be the beginning of a global trend (Yang, Kim, & Dhalwani, 2008). The personal computer, although originally developed in the United States, has now become an indispensable 'appliance' in households across the world. The addition of this 'modern appliance' has been compounded by the Internet and the access it provides to a multitude of services and information that were previously impossible in one setting. The Internet has undoubtedly changed the way we think of our world and shaped the very way we confront many obstacles and tasks in our lives: 'with the click of a button'. Everyday tasks that previously required trips to various different locations (for example, to purchase an air-ticket, shop for weekly groceries, research a school report etc.) can now all be accomplished by the home PC using the various tools and resources available on the Internet.

It is not surprising then, with so many of our day-to-day tasks negotiated on the Internet, that our relationships and social interactions might also be facilitated and this is essentially the service online social networks provide (Rheingold, 2002). Through these networks users are given a context and sets of discursive tools with which to communicate and 'interact' with their friends, family, and even people they don't

physically know. One appliance can now provide access to tools enabling social interaction with a varied multitude of people. It is not difficult to see that the sheer magnitude of the proliferation of such technology begins to pose questions regarding the nature of the effects of such technology. Computers, the Internet, mobile-technology, and online social networks have fundamentally altered the way we think about communication and consequently the way we approach others (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001; Rheingold, 2002). Whereas in the past we might have walked to someone's house to interact with them, we can now pick up a mobile phone and call them, and if our call was not successful, we can use an online social network to access their profile, leave them a message, or see what they have been thinking and doing. Technology now affords us methods of mutual and shared action which were not previously possible and has consequently become a way of co-ordinating action (Rheingold, 2002).

The consequences of such a shift in individual and collective forms of interaction and communication are unclear and therefore form part of the impetus for this research. An effective analysis of the impact of modern technological tools is unattainable at present, however the importance of trying to understand and engage with these consequences is an imperative if we are to accurately formulate an awareness and understanding of the human condition and the impact modern forms of technology has on it.

## Chapter 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

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There are today literally hundreds of Online Social Networks (OSNs) that each function differently in order to provide different services to their users. There is no standard definition of OSNs but they can roughly be described as web-based services which allow people to connect through a set of social relationships (such as friendships, co-working, or information exchange) that provide individuals with advanced tools for sharing digital objects (e.g. texts, pictures, videos, music, URLs, bookmarks, applications, etc.) and for communication and socialisation between members of these OSNs (Cachia, et al., 2007). In addition to this individuals are able to construct a public or semi-public profile, view and traverse their own personal list of connections and those made by others in the same system (boyd & Ellison, 2008).

### **Facebook: An Introduction**

Since its inception in 2004 Facebook has not only undergone various changes to the regulations regarding Facebook user-ship, but a major platform change took place in 2008, and again in 2010. The Facebook platform is central to our understanding of Facebook as well as how its users employ it. In addition, Facebook's structure provides insight into the developer's agenda and intent regarding user-ship. Neil Postman (1993, p. 13) notes in his critique of technology's impact on culture and society, that "embedded in every tool is an ideological bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another...". It becomes somewhat apparent then that Facebook identifies the importance of structural and architectural factors on the site based on the several revisions made to these features since its inception.

When first navigating to facebook.com, individuals are greeted by the welcome screen. Facebook has a tag line stating, "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life". The diagram of faces all over the world with the dotted lines connecting them to one another suggests that Facebook is primarily a tool of connectivity and the use of a global map suggests that human relationships can now transcend physical boundaries and it is thus possible for people to have relationships with others across countries and continents. New members are able to sign up on the page and are only required to provide their name, e-mail address, sex and date of birth. New users can select "Why do I need to provide this information?" and a window will pop

up stating "Facebook requires all users to provide their real date of birth as both a safety precaution and as a means of preserving the integrity of the site. You will be able to hide this information from your profile if you wish." As the meaning of 'integrity' is not provided the statement is quite vague and although the provision of personal details in the setting up of the account seems logical, there is an obvious concern on behalf of Facebook that their services or site might be 'abused' by users. This provides an insight into the nature of the Facebook platform. As opposed to being like many other web 2.0 applications on the Internet, Facebook is concerned with how it is perceived by its users. It is unlikely to gain credence in the eyes of members and non-members alike if profiles are not perceived as somehow "authentic". It is critical to remember that although Facebook operates as an online social network it is essentially a business, and as a business it is concerned with profit margins and the quality of product it provides to its individual and corporate customers (Tellis, 2008).

Once existing members have logged in using their e-mail address—verified when they signed up—they are taken to the Home page containing the News Feed. The News Feed in many ways acts as a plot-summary of the activities one's Facebook friends have performed. This includes status updates, photograph additions, note posts, wall posts, group additions and relationship updates. Although, by utilising Facebook's privacy settings, users can adjust what information is published, many users are either unsure or disinterested in making these adjustments and as a result there is much private data that is published on the News Feed. The News Feed thus acts as a gateway into the world of Facebook. Individuals with many friends are taken first here—as opposed to their own profiles—as it provides the necessary information to legitimate their use of the service. People are given access to their friends first through the News Feed and then they can decide if they wish to discover more of what that particular person is doing. Interestingly, the News Feed allows users to select whether they wish to see more or less of a particular person's Facebook activity or what type of information (more, or less, wall posts, photograph-stories, note postings, etc.) and thus it is clear that much of the kind and amount of information users are exposed to is controllable to a large extent.

The News Feed is further broken down into status updates, photograph-stories, link additions and the real-time live-feed. Above this, users can update their status and are given a default text that asks them "What are you doing right now?" The use of this phrase clearly suggests the type of information Facebook wishes its users to share in the status update. Although any information can be provided the emphasis is on current activity rather than emotional state or physical location. Superficially this seems relatively straight forward, and yet the decision to make the status update primarily about activity alludes to a voyeuristic element of Facebook. Research that I conducted in my Honours Research Project found that in spite of the few references to voyeurism on the site itself, the monitoring of Facebook friends was identified as one of the principle uses of Facebook. Many of the respondents spoke of how they used Facebook as a way to keep up to date with 'friends' and to 'check up on them'. Respondents used words such as 'spying' that seems to indicate an acknowledgment that this particular use of Facebook acts as an almost invasive form of interaction. Since the



Facebook profile page is accessible by users' friends at any point in time, users are able to log on and immediately 'access' their Facebook friends through this virtual forum (Nortjé, 2008). The more frequently users log onto Facebook the more likely they are to see more of the Facebook activity on the News Feed page. This is clearly one of the alluring qualities of Facebook. The more time allocated to Facebook, the more likely a user will be current with their Facebook friends' activities on Facebook.

To the right of the screen Facebook provides links to a toolbar where users can automatically import all their contacts from a host of e-mail service-providers and use them to search for more contacts that they can then add as Facebook friends. This particular feature has been compared to other sites such as Mixi in Japan and it has been noted that the Facebook interface indicates an attempt to gain user compliance through simplicity and credibility (Fogg & Iizawa, 2008). This is compared to the less direct approach taken by Mixi where users are required to type in the addresses of each friend they wish to invite to use the service and thus requires more care and consideration in the acquisition of friends. Facebook, on the other hand, is known for a culture where having many friends is a mark of status (Riegelsberger, Vasalou, Bonhard, & Adams, 2006).

Although the News Feed is an alluring aspect of the site, it is undoubtedly the Profile page that truly encapsulates the essence of Facebook. All users upon signing up with Facebook are provided with a personal Profile page. There are a number of settings regarding the information they wish to provide to other users and friends alike, but the heart of the Facebook experience lies in creating, maintaining and updating their profile page. As previously mentioned, the Facebook platform has undergone two major revamps since its inception in 2004 and it is clear that a great deal of planning and consideration went into the adjustments made. The Profile page can be divided up into 3 main sections.

The first section, found to the far right, contains advertisements. Facebook is primarily a business and part of its revenue comes through advertisements on the site. As opposed to many other service-based websites, Facebook does allow users a certain degree of control and although users do not have the option to remove advertisements altogether, they are granted a certain level of agency in deciding what they are exposed to. Users are able to provide feedback on the advertisement, saying whether they liked or disliked it. With the use of an algorithm, the site collects the data and uses it to display advertisements based on the users' ratings. This is an example of the way modern forms of technology are being used to create consumers that are themselves the producers of what they consume (Rheingold, 2002). The inclusion of consumers in the creation of the products they consume has been identified as one of the reasons for the success of such ONSs as MySpace.

The far left hand side of the page contains the user's profile picture, summary of information, friends list, and photograph albums. If the user has installed third-party applications they may also appear directly underneath

these.<sup>1</sup> Most users will have installed at least one—if not more—third-party applications that they use in addition to Facebook as either a form of entertainment (e.g. Poker games) or to keep abreast of current affairs (e.g. plug-ins created by the BBC or the Washington Post). Directly underneath one's profile picture there is a small space where users are advised to "write something about yourself". Some users choose to provide a short description of themselves, or in some cases provide other, seemingly random, information.

In the centre of the page is the Profile Wall, where Facebook friends can post comments and leave messages. Recording the individual's Facebook activity in chronological order, the Profile Wall acts as a personalised News feed. Users are allowed to delete posts they don't want to appear in the Facebook home page of their friends, and this is often the case when a Facebook user ends a relationship and wishes it to remain 'private'. Another 'new' feature is the option for friends to leave comments regarding an individual's activity. A person can update their own status and one of their friends may wish to leave a comment regarding the status update or choose to 'like it' by clicking the little thumbs-up next to the updated post. This then leaves a notification for the user. It is clear that in revamping the profile page, the developers aimed to increase the interaction that takes place on an individual's page as opposed to the main home feed. This does provide the semblance of a more intimate kind of 'e-interaction' in that comments and 'likes' are displayed on the person's profile page as well as in the News Feed.

As Fogg and Iizawa (2008) note, the Facebook interface prompts users to provide revealing information. Indeed, much of Facebook use, although based on interaction between friends, is self-reflexive. There are many opportunities for users to tailor-make and develop their profile pages and, as a result, profoundly affect the way in which their friends perceive them. Much of the interaction derived on Facebook comes from its users willingness to disclose information. The more a Facebook user updates his or her status (or other profile aspects) the more likely that information will appear in the News Feed and so be publicised to that person's network and friends. As I discussed in my Honours research report, effective Facebook interaction necessitates the existence of a symbiotic relationship between users and by investing resources into the creation and maintenance of one's profile, increase the likelihood that their profile will serve in creating interaction with Facebook friends (Nortjé, 2008).

A person's profile picture is an important aspect of their profile. As is also the case with MySpace, many Facebook users opt to use the privacy settings and make their profile page accessible to only their friends or networks (Pfeil, Arjan, & Zaphiris, 2008). As a result, when another Facebook user searches for that person the only information that appears is the name and profile picture. Often users will opt to use images other than their own thus making it more difficult for friends to recognise and connect with them. This also raises the idea

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<sup>1</sup> Third-party applications are plug-ins that are created by software developers other than those under Facebook's employment, but are designed to work with Facebook and are used for various other services and entertainment purposes.

of impression-management in that users are afforded much latitude in creating an impression of themselves online. The profile picture acts as the first impression the user creates, as before a potential Facebook friend has access to an extended profile, they are exposed to the profile picture. Although we all possess a certain degree of agency in the way we create our impressions in reality, much of what is typically part of impression-creation such as body language, verbal articulation and facial gestures become peripheral on Facebook as users can select a specific photograph that they prefer.

## **Facebook as 'Social'**

Part of Facebook's appeal stems from the fact that others use it. Most Facebook users are recruited by other friends in that they are sent invitations to join the site. Chiu, Cheung, & Lee (2008) discuss Facebook use as a form of collective interaction. In this regard, they use the term "we-intention" and define it as a commitment of an individual to engage in joint action that involves an implicit or explicit agreement to engage in that joint action. Although Facebook is undoubtedly a virtual setting, it is nonetheless compatible with notions of collective action and agency in that it implies direct or indirect human contact. Chiu et al. (2008) use social presence theory and social influence theory to show how the social presence of Facebook users is seen through the use of the News Feed. The study demonstrated how the popularity of Facebook was contingent on the number of people using it. As a result we see that Facebook is really only as popular as the people who use it and the site is highly reliant not only on the frequency of use but on the number of people who are users and are able to access and interact with as many individuals as they can. This ratifies the research conducted by Fogg & Iizawa (2008) in that their own research highlighted the quantity of friends as a pivotal part of the way Facebook is marketed: the idea of an identity of 'connectedness' in the midst of a socially isolated world. In my Honours research project I investigated this notion of connectedness and the way in which this is marketed on Facebook.

In a world where social cohesiveness is in jeopardy, Facebook seems to offer its users a way to stay 'connected' or 'in touch' with other users. Although it is doubtful that it was originally designed to act as a substitute for face-to-face interaction, this seems to have become the case in South Africa (Nortjé, 2008). Operating in a global society that has been criticised for its social indifference and isolation, Facebook users are 'sold' an identity of togetherness and contact through the online social network. Although individualism and hedonism are certainly still very much a part of modern society, perhaps at a level of identity society is attempting to re-establish the importance or necessity of social cohesiveness (Nortjé, 2008).

## **Communicative Reformation**

The very nature of our method of communication has changed and consequently become an important focus of recent research. Modern forms of communication and technology are somewhat synonymous in that their development is mutually dependant. OSNs foster creativity and unlike older forms of communication foster many-to-many communication that was previously impossible. However, this 'added' creativity is not unanimously embraced as a benefit or improvement to more traditional forms of communication. Hassan (2004) asserts that although users are able to exercise extreme creativity in the networked society, much of the innovation produced takes place within the boundaries of a certain underlying logic as well as the binary and linear constraints of the technological devices that realise this society. The implications of modern forms of communication are several, including a redefinition of the way we conceive of community. Previously the notion of community represented a cohesive network with clearly delineated relations. OSNs, however, present an image of a community which is comprised of people from all over the world who can simultaneously communicate and interact with each other in a range of multi-modal channels such as real-time chat and audio-visual material (Cachia, et al., 2007). Rheingold (2002) discusses the way in which mobile phone technology has dramatically altered the social make-up of society. As a result, mobile phone technology reaches further into our lives, creating an indispensability that was previously not there. In addition to the changes to social structure and forms of communication, these modern forms of technology also begin to construct and fashion their own reality, with its own set of conversational norms, that sometimes violate the physical counterparts of what we understand as 'social reality'. How then do we negotiate this emerging technologically propelled reality with physical reality if they are often in opposition to each other? There is no definitive answer to this question, but Rheingold (2002) presents them as pertinent issues worthy of consideration in the growing body of research in the area. As well as being able to identify modern forms of communication, OSNs can be used to detect changes in social behaviour (Cachia, et al., 2007). Research conducted at Stanford University developed a small student community called 'Club Nexus' and began to notice strong correlations between Nexus members real lives (personalities, tastes, hobbies, academic majors, and genders) and their online profiles. The study also showed that the more dynamic the community, the more likely it is to attract new members. Many OSNs consequently publicly store vast quantities of historical communication and information that might be used to predict or map future social trends (Cachia, et al., 2007).

## **Method-evolution**

As our method and form of communication evolves, so too must the collection of methods with which we choose to study these phenomena. Traditional methods of analysis are justifiably problematic in that there is little to no evidence that existing methodology can generate valid and interpretable insights when applied to

emerging technologies. Linguists and critical psychologists typically view text or language as being constructed across multiple modes of communication which include not only speech and gesture, but the 'contextual phenomena' that are characterised by the ways in which we use our physical spaces to carry out discursive practices (Fairclough, 1995; Levine & Scollon, 2004). One such method, increasingly used in the analysis of modern technology outputs, is Multimodal Discourse Analysis or MDA (Levine & Scollon, 2004).

Major contributions to MDA tend to adopt one of two approaches. The first approach carefully follows the origins of multimodality in Halliday's systematic-functional linguistics (SFL) and the systemic goals its orientation outlines (Bhatia, Flowerdew, & John, 2008). The second approach is closer to discourse analysis and its younger counterpart, critical discourse analysis, in terms of methodological orientation. Although these two approaches share several similarities, SFL based MDA focuses on the generation and development of multimodal systemic theory whereas the DA and CDA based MDA prioritises the 'object' of analysis as opposed to the specific development of theory (Constantinou, 2005). Despite this difference, MDA as an overarching method attempts to synthesise multiple disciplines through the development of a holistic theoretical position and a unit of analysis that speaks to these varying disciplines in a unifying manner. It bases its positioning on the assumption – similar to CDA – that all social action is mediated and significantly discursive (Scollon, 2001). Scollon (2001) also argues that mediated discourse theory does not approach language as **the** determining and totalising force in the production of social actions and positions. Despite this, the position is strengthened by an attempt to explicate the relationship that exists between human psychological processes and social structure by focusing on the mediated social actions in which this relationship manifests itself. MDA seeks to ensure that social action is viewed as a product of everyday actions that are themselves a product of practice, discourse, technology and analysis.

As well as concentrating on the ways in which social action is mediated, MDA acknowledges the importance of context in analysing discourse. Presently, as there is a far greater degree of emphasis on social connection, embodied interaction and collaborative production in digital communicative technologies, the importance of location is becoming increasingly important as these modern forms of technology (such as Web 2.0) function to connect people and their content to one another (Bhatia, et al., 2008; Gordon, 2007). Despite this growing emphasis and importance being afforded to the role of context in linguistics over recent years, studies that use computer-mediated communication have often avoided engaging with the virtual and actual environments in which such communication is generated. This results in the de-contextualisation and therefore a restricted analysis of the various texts (such as chat logs and e-mail messages) (Levine & Scollon, 2004). Fairclough (1995) acknowledges that the degree to which context is relevant to the investigation of discourse practices is often questioned, but the wider contextual matrix also needs to be considered as it shapes these practices in important ways and is itself shaped and structured by them. Discourse practice then becomes a mediator of the textual, social, cultural and sociocultural practices. Other than the contextual and socio-cultural elements of

discourse, recent work has begun to elucidate the ways in which physical space contains and shapes the production of discourse. Typically, the placement of signs and systems of representation was not considered in discussions surrounding discourse (Saint-Georges, 2004). However, in recent years, new disciplines have emerged to address the physical and territorial placement of systems of representation and how these variables ultimately contribute to meaning within a system. Geosemiotics, for example, assesses signs in relation with the 'lived spatiality's' they ecologically develop, transform or live in (Saint-Georges, 2004). This branch of broader semiotics has been applied to the analysis of space and how it is constructed by spatial layout and the role played by discourse in organising spaces of action. The development of such tools in the practice of discourse analysis identifies a clear trend in the broadening of our understanding of what constitutes 'discourse'. Although text and language are often considered the primary modes through which discourse is manifested, the importance of context and space are slowly becoming central to the analysis of discourse, particularly with regards to mediated discourses.

Apart from its emphasis on the importance of context, mode and medium are salient to both approaches to MDA. However, there are varying definitions of the term 'mode' and 'modality'.

## **Conceptual Framework**

Multimodal Discourse Analysis stems from a set of assumptions regarding the ways discourse manifests itself: not only through conventional text, but through a host of modes that all enact or feature the varying elements of discourse and discourse as social practice. Scollon (2001) puts forth a conceptual framework in *Mediated Discourse: the Nexus of Practice* that seeks to encapsulate current thoughts regarding discourse as well as present alternative approaches to discourse analysis. Primarily, these approaches propose that social action and discourse are linked, but the ways in which these two are linked is not always directly evident.

Scollon (2001) identifies five central concepts needed when formulating a theoretical foundation for mediated discourse analysis viz. mediated action, site of engagement, mediational means, practice, and nexus of practice.

Mediated action identifies social actors and the focus – and unit of analysis – becomes their action in varying social contexts. This highlights the irresolvable dialectic between action and the material means that mediate all social action. In consumer-based societies, participation is necessitated through the transfer of tokens, objects and social forms of capital. The notion of mediated action refutes the possibility of such actions occurring independently of participation in discourse and, similarly, no such discourses are possible without concrete, material actions (Scollon, 2001).

Site of engagement proposes that all mediated action must occur in a particular social space. In this regard, the site of engagement describes the point at which social practices and mediational means – such as cultural tools – intersect and make that action the focal point of attention for relevant participants. Mediated actions become moments in ‘history’ so to speak and their interpretation is based within the social practices that are linked to that specific moment.

In conceptualising Mediational means, Scollon (2001) employs Bourdieu’s (as cited in Haralambos, Holborn, & Heald, 2000) concept of habitus, in particular the structures therein, to explicate the interaction that results in the creation of mediated action through material objects in the world. Habitus, although a complex concept, can be roughly described as the values, dispositions and expectations of social groups that are borne from experience. Individuals internalise the values, behaviour and expectations of the habitus, which ultimately play a role in the shaping of their future actions, and consequently, mediated actions (Haralambos, et al., 2000).

In order for mediated action to occur an intersection is required between social practices and mediational means that in turn reproduce social groups, histories and identities. Practice and social structure describes the proposition that mediated discourse analysis is only interpretable within practices and does not neutralise practices and social structures as ‘context’ but endeavours to maintain them in our interpretations of mediated actions.

Nexus of practice is perhaps the most important concept in this model as it describes the impression – however narrow – that social practice is plural. In this regard, mediated discourse analysis sees the ‘nexus’ as ordering, purchasing, handling and receiving. It links to other practices – both those that are discursive in nature and those that aren’t – and over time helps form this nexus. The idea of a ‘nexus’ is an improvement on its predecessor ‘community’ of practice in that its structure is looser and includes a consideration of being structured over time.

The aforementioned concepts form the basis of the theoretical principles Scollon (2001) subsequently presents, viz. Social action, Communication and History. The principle of social action states that discourse is best operationalised as a product or consequence of social actions as opposed to systems of representation or thoughts. This principle is also accompanied by four corollaries that expand on the principle and aid in its formulation. First, social action is the ecological unit of analysis in which phenomena occur, change, and develop through time in such a way that the moment of taking an action along with mediational means are used person to person in a form of exchange. Second, and relating to practice specifically, is the tenet that all social action is based on inferred, automatic or instinctive actions. Third, habitus, forms the basis of social action and continues to be formulated through the cyclical relationship habitus forms with an individual’s accumulated repertoire and knowledge of social action. Fourth, all social actions occur within the nexus of practice that itself models implicit and explicit affirmations with regard to the social groups and positions

participants within these groups occupy viz. speakers, hearers and those spoken about or in front of. This 'positioning' resembles an identity claim in that it seeks to describe any action that reproduces the fashioned identities of previous social actions. In addition, it seeks to negotiate new identity positions within the nexus of practice that these participants may come to occupy. The fifth corollary speaks directly to socialisation as all social actions and communication serve in the positioning of participants within the nexus of practice. Sixth, as a result of the principle of socialisation, all communication has the simultaneous effect of 'othering' those who are identified by not being members of the relevant nexus of practice, i.e. the pluralist nature of social actions (Scollon, 2001).

The principle of communication asserts that the meaning of the term 'social', in reference to social action, necessitates the existence of a shared system of meaning since communication is a requisite for an action to be considered social. The first corollary of this principle asserts that the production of shared meanings is consequently mediated by a host of cultural tools such as language, gesture, physical objects and institutions that are themselves vessels of sociocultural archives. Mediation in this context serves to maintain the consummate understanding of the mediated nature of discourse. Second, mediational means are involved in mediated actions which are organised in a complex manner despite their more salient, preferred or emotionally engaging relations within a particular site of engagement in question (Scollon, 2001). The third and final principle, the principle of history, serves in ensuring that 'social' is understood as 'historical'.

Shared meaning, regardless of how it is achieved, requires some form of relationship or connection with previous experiences that form the basis of a common history or past. The first corollary of this principle is that of interdiscursivity in that the principle of history compels the positioning of communication within multiple, overlapping and at times conflicting, discourses. Intertextuality, secondly, acknowledges the presence of borrowed utterances within discourses. Third, no form of communication acts independently of other communications. Dialogicality (conversational or practical inference) sees communication as a product of itself in that it will either seek to respond to, or anticipate other communications (Scollon, 2001).

Ultimately, these concepts and principles seek to identify the mediational nature of communication and consequently discourse. In the formulation of concepts and theoretical positions, the plausibility of interdisciplinary work becomes ameliorated. In addition, the development of mediated – as well as multimodal – discourse theory has aided the subsequent development of methods that permit researchers to apply recent theoretical developments in the meaningful and formative analysis of discourse. Furthermore, these theoretical developments have brought with them an interest in technological devices and tools, particularly with regards to how these ultimately shape and determine the nature and evolution of discursive practices in society (Scollon, 2001).



## Semiotic Revolution and Sign

Although online social networks are a product of the last decade, aspects of contemporary critical theory speak to the emergence of this and similar technologies. Jean Baudrillard, in particular, has made extensive contributions to these emerging phenomena and the consequences they may have on reality, society and individual relations (Poster, 1979).

Baudrillard has often been criticised for his somewhat revolutionist and radical approach to understanding post-modern society and the technology that has come to characterise it (Kellner, 2009; Poster, 1979). Despite these criticisms, Baudrillard remains one of the few theorists to have engaged with the ontological and epistemological facets of technology as well as providing a Marxist critique of the way in which consumer culture has affected the progression of the 'networked' society, as he calls it (Baudrillard, 2006). Baudrillard is often considered a post-structuralist and indeed much of his major theoretical contributions have been received as such. However, it would be insincere to classify him purely in this regard, as much of the revisions and return to previous work have produced a host of new ideas and intellectual grapplings that are not so neatly categorised (which resembles the position most often adopted) (Merrin, 2005).

Baudrillard's early work in Symbolic Exchange developed from a tradition of privileging an immediately actualised mode of relations and the manner in which it transforms experience and communication. To understand the ideas he presents in this work, it is first necessary to contextualise them against the theoretical premises that preceded and influenced its development. Baudrillard, similar to many French critical theorists of the time, lists a host of influences including Marx, Durkheim, Derrida, Bataille, Barthe, Sartre, Hegel, McLuhan, Mauss and Benjamin. The broad range of influences on Baudrillard provides his theoretical accomplishments with a degree of holism that aids in the application of his work to a range of disciplines. Baudrillard uses the concept of symbolic exchange to unify notions of 'the festival', 'the gift' and 'the sacrifice' and fashions with them a central theme highlighting their ultimate role in the creation of a mode of relations and communication (Merrin, 2005).

Baudrillard uses Mauss' extension of the Durkheimian concept of 'Sacred and Profane', to describe the rules that underlie basic human interaction. Mauss employs the concept of 'the gift' to describe the creation and maintenance of affective relationships in an anthropological analysis of various tribal cultures. The 'gift' in this regard characterises a process involving three steps. First, a person has to give, then receive and finally, after a suitable length of time, return a gift of greater value that finalises the exchange ending with an affective surplus of sorts. This process, Mauss noted, created powerful social relations that culminated in the establishment of affective ties and alliances between families and tribes. The by-product of this exchange, however, was a feeling of indebtedness and obligation that often resulted in the delineation of social power (Merrin, 2005). In this regard, the gift maintains a contradictory character of both positive communication and

agonistic confrontation (Merrin, 2005). Mauss continues – in a genealogical account similar to that favoured by Foucault – that this particular mode of relations once distinguishing most societies is now replaced by an inferior version that prioritises individual gain and satisfaction over – or even at the expense of – collective social cohesiveness.

It is in the midst of this understanding that Baudrillard begins to assemble – however pessimistic – an account of post-modern relations. Although he makes extensive use of Barthe's own application of Saussurean linguistics (predominantly lifted from *Mythologies*), Baudrillard's account is heavily Durkheimian in nature. Essentially Baudrillard builds on a Marxist account of capitalist society, but argues that consumption has replaced production (Baudrillard, 1983; Merrin, 2005). In addition, he distinguishes consumption from production in that consumption is governed by a code of signification in its semiotic organisation. For Baudrillard, the sign becomes of paramount importance in the post-modern consumer-based society in that consumption represents a form of idealist activity that results in the systematic manipulation of these signs. Traditional, more primitive, societies like those studied by Mauss operated using a mode of relation characterised by symbolic exchange: exchanges that were actualised and bound to human activity with real consequences that mediated an authentic relationship or directly experienced situation. This mode of relations created powerful, full and collective human relationships where meaning is rooted in time and a dual existence is maintained – one of communication and confrontation. The sign, however, is the product of the destruction of this relationship and this transforms all relations and meaning into signs that are consumed, appropriated and combined in a manner that typifies modern industrial societies (Baudrillard, 2006). Baudrillard sees the emergence of semiotised society as a negative development that results in the immolation of the sacred and the destruction of meaningful, symbolic interaction. The sign system then serves only in the interest of itself and represents society's emersion into a totalitarian code that completely pervades and reorganises everyday life. This leads Baudrillard to assert that our entire reality is a semiotic production and simulation that is further abstracted and rationalised to appear as real. The picture painted here by Baudrillard is far from optimistic and much of the tonality and diction he employs in his writing serves only to accentuate his nihilistic account of technology and post-modern society. Despite this dramatisation, Baudrillard offers a refreshing account of the impact of technological innovation that does not immediately seek to comply with the banality of acquiescence.

Apart from his account of the evolution of the semiotised society, Baudrillard undertakes a major critique of digital media. It is these manifestations of electronic media that ultimately elevate the transformation of the symbolic into the semiotic (Merrin, 2005). He takes the Marxist exposition of alienation and argues that in the consumer society alienation is absolute as it governs the very structure of the market society resulting in total commodification: a society where everything can be bought and sold (Kellner, 2009). This extreme form of alienation presents an image of a society where symbolic (real) communication is absent. The arrival of online

social networks that serve in the direct interaction of individuals in spite of the absence of face-to-face interaction presents an obstacle to Baudrillard's attempt at debunking the romanticised 'digital society'. Regardless of this, the questions Baudrillard asks of his readers are still pertinent.

In Cool Memories IV, Baudrillard (2003, pp. 24, 48) presents a brief account of the mobile phone in post-modern society:

New urban figure: the man standing on the street corner, mobile phone in hand, or wheeling around like some limp beast, still talking to no one. A living insult to the passers-by. Only madmen and alcoholics can flout public space in this way, talking to themselves. But they at least are connected up to their inner madness. Whereas mobile-phone-man imposes on everyone – who has no interest in it whatsoever – the virtual presence of the network, which is public enemy number one.

One day the only people left of the streets will be zombies – one group with their mobile phones, the other with their headphones or video headsets. Everyone will be simultaneously elsewhere. They already are. In the past, you could isolate yourself internally. Now you can isolate yourself externally, can retreat into the outer core of your being. Confinement in prison is giving way to the mobile confinement of the network, just as *rigor mortis* has given way to the corpse-like flexibility of switching-man, protean man, Nietzsche's 'chameleon'.

The man with his mobile phone steps over the threshold of the exhibition. His phone rings. He goes round the exhibition without a glance, riveted as he is to his inner ear. He speaks, and looks at you as though you were on the other end of the line. He is looking at someone he is not speaking to. He is talking to someone he cannot see. Purposeless purpose of the wireless phone.

It becomes apparent that for Baudrillard the proliferation of digital technologies provides a contrasting effect. On the one hand, mobile phones may present a means of communication, but these devices also present a means of avoiding communication by enabling a form of physical avoidance that might ordinarily arise from chance encounters. The mobile phone is limiting in that it separates the individual from experiencing and partaking in a mode of relations that prioritises direct, unmediated and symbolic interaction. Baudrillard alerts his readers to a somewhat sinister agenda of these technologies and asks us to question their content as well as whether or not these mediated communicative experiences actually constitute communication or whether they are merely a reduction and simplification of human expression and meaning. In fact, Baudrillard asserts that even when these digital technologies appear to be enhancing human expression – as they so often do – they still involve a separation from one's immediate and proximate environment and are bought-into as a result of the promise and simulation of the symbolic relationship they in turn replace (Kellner, 2009; Merrin, 2005). McLuhan (as cited in Lane, 2001) posited the eventual realisation of 'organic' digital media that would result in

technologies developing a degree of interactivity that would inhibit us from differentiating between man and machine.

Baudrillard uses the concept of hyper-reality to describe a point at which representation gives way to simulation (Baudrillard, 1983; Nunes, 1995). At this point, reality gives way to hyper-reality and the political economy is no longer the foundation or even part of a structural account of reality where other phenomena can be interpreted and explained (Kellner, 2009). The shift from reality to hyper-reality represents for Baudrillard the progression from modern societies to post-modern societies: production is no longer the organising force but is replaced rather by simulation and the economy of the sign takes precedence. In these post-modern societies, identity is no longer a product of subjective experience but is rather determined by the appropriation of images. Codes and models now play an integral part in determining how people interpret their subjectivities and how they relate to others. Individuals begin to avoid daily, everyday life, as the experience they glean from these situations is far less intense than the stimuli they receive from entertainment, information and communication technologies. Hyper-Reality then becomes more than real: senses are overloaded with simulations and stimuli that result in the fragmentation and loss of subjectivities (Kellner, 2009). In Baudrillard's account of post-modern society this fragmentation, or loss of subjectivity, occurs as a direct result of the subject's emersion into the digital domain and 'networked' society. As opposed to the traditional philosophic subject who employs his or her subjectivity by seeking to determine the nature of reality by establishing a relationship with various objects, the subject fabricates relationships with simulations that are constituted outside of reality. In the former, the subject is fully cognisant of the features that differentiate his or her own subjectivity from the object. Not unlike post-structuralism, Baudrillard asserts that discourse and thought are no longer bound to a priori structures of 'the real' and this contests the very meaning of the concept 'real'.

Kellner (2009) asserts that Baudrillard's account of hyper-reality results in the portrayal of post-modern societies as being characterised by dedifferentiation. As a result, the boundaries that once previously separated and maintained a form of social order lose their power, which results in an implosion of sorts. The problem with such an interpretation is that the destruction of social structures which maintain systems of hierarchy and stratification would ordinarily not be held as a negative outcome by post-structuralist accounts. An alternative here – one that maintains the post-structuralist flavour of Baudrillard's post-modern world – is that the shift to hyper-reality is accompanied by a shift of power from these systems of social stratification to the domain of the digital (Lane, 2001). Digital media then, as the gatekeeper of simulation, uses technology to buttress the universality and functionality of the world it has helped create.

## **Ideology and Discourse**

Although Baudrillard's arguments and concepts have often been viewed as post-modern in their analysis and critique of society, he is not the only one to have critically engaged with the concepts of symbolic exchange and sign. Post-modernism, as a body of thought, can be roughly differentiated into two broad varieties. The one strand, so to speak, is primarily concerned with enacting a form of resistance against the dominant discourses that it perceives legitimates the capitalist world. The other is a more evolutionary approach that seeks to describe and explain – at times – the general progression away from modernist thought and culture (Carmichael, 1991). To place Baudrillard in one of these is limiting and untrue, as I have previously mentioned, but his approach can be roughly delineated in one of these two strands. Other theorists such as Frederic Jameson (as cited in Carmichael, 1991) are perhaps easier to classify into one of these two broader categories in that he conceptualises post-modernism as the super-structural manifestation of the last stages of consumer based capitalism. This last stage of consumer-based capitalism is typified by a 'new depthlessness' in that its entire culture becomes dependant on the image or the simulacrum as Baudrillard terms it. Jameson laments the loss of the 'referential', although the reasoning he provides does not fully convince the reader that his concern is based in legitimate reason, but rather nostalgia for an earlier time in which the tenets of social theory were founded. Despite this ambiguity, Jameson construes the 'symbolic act' as a force that ultimately inscribes its own context that is then read as subtext (Carmichael, 1991). Symbolic action is, according to Jameson, a way of interacting with what we call the 'world' in a way that guises the true nature of that action. The symbolic act begins by creating and producing its own context that is constructed as a point outside of its domain from which it views the fruits of its production. This ultimately results in a paradox where the subtext "as though for the first time, brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and same time, a reaction. It articulates its own situation and textualises it, thereby encouraging and perpetuating the illusion that the situation itself did not exist before it, that there is nothing but a text, that there never was any extra or contextual reality before the text itself generated it in the form of a mirage" (Jameson, 1981, p. 82). The assertion Jameson presents with regards to subtext is directly based on Burke's discussion of ideology and the extent to which it defines mankind's symbol-using capacity (Carmichael, 1991). In his discussion Burke seeks to debunk the extent to which we use symbols versus their use of us. In other words, Burke presents an account that presents symbolicity as a force that simultaneously unites us with the previously inaccessible aspects of the world as well as dividing us from the immediate. He uses the notion of 'terministic screens' to elucidate this point and this in many ways resembles the hyper-reality Baudrillard identifies as the post-modern product of consumer based society: a society where capitalism no longer results in the production of the 'real' but rather the removal of representation as a mode of relations. In this society, the Simulacrum becomes the dominant sign of late capitalist society. The consequence of this is the emergence of a culture where representation is

replaced by the ubiquitous simulation of reality that exerts its force in order to establish a law of equivalence and exchange (Baudrillard, 1983; Carmichael, 1991).

## **Power and Subjectivity**

There is an element of Facebook that alludes to a complex set of power relations that ultimately serve in facilitating agency and control within the service. Michel Foucault, a seminal theorist on power and subjectivity, mapped the evolution of power from the way power was exercised in sovereign times through to modern forms of power such as that of Disciplinary power. Through Individualization and Objectification, which were effectively responsible for the conceptualization of man as an object that could be known, knowledge became the key principle in the study of power. It is thus critical to Foucault, that power and knowledge never be separated (Hook, 2004).

One of the primary goals of disciplinary power is the integration of surveillance into the mechanisms of production and control over individual workers in a society. As a result, subjects inscribe within themselves a power relation that ultimately results in their own subjugation (Hindess, 1996; Hook, 2004). In spite of the increased secrecy and pervasiveness regarding the way power is manifested, Foucault argues that subjects always possess a choice and in lieu of this it is possible to resist power by questioning the knowledge on which it is based. Disciplinary Power separates, analyses, differentiates and produces individuals by constructing them as objects and devices that can be employed in the service of realising certain goals (Hook, 2004). One of the principal ways Disciplinary Power operates within the individual is by ensuring subjects adopt a self-reflexive, self-monitoring and self-judging relationship with themselves and previous research findings noted how the Facebook experience is a deeply self-reflexive identity project that requires constant self evaluation and judgment (Hook, 2004; Nortjé, 2008).

Apart from his assessment of power in post-modern society Foucault wrote extensively on the notion of self and subjectivity. He identified the self as a collection of social relations that aids the implementation of power into subjective forms (Hook, 2004). As previously mentioned, power evolved from sovereign power or 'power of death' to Disciplinary Power that Foucault identifies as a 'Power of Life'. Disciplinary Power is concerned with the control and modification of life processes that ultimately serve to measure, predict and monitor the different aspects of a population. For Foucault – and other theorists – technology is one of the principle ways power is exercised in society. Although Foucault never produced a singular definition of 'technologies of the self', it can be roughly described as the way in which people present and police themselves in society (Gauntlett, 2002). Self-government is an essential component of any governmental power since modern states are typified by individual subjectivity (Hook, 2004). The way in which the self has had an impact on modern

society is irrefutable. It is considered an integral part of personhood and since Foucault argues that power works through individuality and subjectivity, the 'self' is a crucial element in the networks of power, regulation in the production and shaping of subjects and consequently, subjectivity (Hook, 2004).

It is, however, necessary to differentiate 'technologies of the self' from 'technologies of subjectivity'. Foucault (as cited in Rose, 1995, p. 78) argues that technologies of the self are that "which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality." Technologies of subjectivity, as presented by Rose (1995), are those technologies that facilitate the development of individuals into subjects, viz. the practices which require us to constantly evaluate, analyse, inspect and problematise ourselves in accordance with the norms and regulations of a social order that are involved in the functioning of a form of power. Technologies of subjectivity, in essence, are the mechanisms through which the intent and goal of this power are internalised in the subject so that these processes become ubiquitous with those activated in the development and regulation of one's self (Rose, 1995). It is evident to see how Facebook might be considered such a technology as Facebook users constantly revise, assess and evaluate their profiles – in essence a representation of their self – in accordance with a conceptual equivalent of their subjectivity.

## Chapter 3

# RESEARCH AIMS

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Although there have been several studies that have engaged with social network sites, most have concentrated on the individuals who use the site. User participation aside, the Facebook site has been extensively revised since its inception in 2004 and has often done so with the aid and input of its users. As a result the site can be construed as a reflection and amalgamation of the perceptions, desires, constructs and preferences of its user-ship. Consequentially, the benefit and relevancy of such an analysis speaks for itself. To direct the analysis, I focused on the architecture – or design, as Kress and van Leeuwen operationalise it – of the Facebook platform, paying specific attention to the way this structure may serve in the maintenance of its existing user-ship and in the acquisition of new users. Additionally, I endeavoured to explore the way its design and architecture serve in the proposition of a particular ideology and to what extent the architecture and structure of the site communicate a greater 'world view'. The research also sought to establish the degree to which the design or structural aspects of the site are congruent with the textual and more apparent discourses, such as those that appear in the 'Facebook Principles' presented on the site. These research aims can be summed up as follows:

- (a) *To critically analyse the architecture of Facebook, paying specific attention to the discursive mechanisms and devices employed in maintaining its existing user-ship and communication of a central ideology.*
- (b) *To assess the extent to which this particular ideology is reflected in the 'physical' or structural components of the site.*
- (c) *To compare alternative modes of discourse such as the Facebook architecture and sections of text in order to establish the degree to which these are convergent or divergent from each other.*



## Chapter 4

# SAMPLE AND CORPUS OF TEXTS ANALYSED

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The first part of the research used a form of critical discourse analysis (multimodal discourse analysis) to perform an analysis of the Facebook Home page and consequentially no live participants were required. In addition to the Home page, elements from the Profile page were incorporated and since these elements are representative of the particular structure used on Facebook, as opposed to making reference to a particular individual, my own Profile page was used for this portion of the analysis instead of those of my Facebook friends as was originally outlined in the proposal.

The majority of the analysis is concerned with the structural and architectural properties of the site and, in this regard, reference to 'text' is misleading. In essence, although these elements of the Facebook site are not 'text' in the traditional sense of the word, they are instantiations of particular discourses that manifest themselves through various modes. The growing body of knowledge surrounding discourse and discourse analysis acknowledges the extent to which discourses are created through varying modes, all of which are significant to our understanding of the ways in which these inform our understanding of social practices and communication (Aiello, 2006; Carmichael, 1991; Constantinou, 2005; Fairclough, 1995; Loon, 2008; Scollon, 2001; Scollon & Scollon, 2007; Shaoxiang, 2007).

As described in the Research Aims, the analysis was divided into two parts. The principle portion of the analysis is concerned with the 'deconstruction' of the Facebook site using multimodal discourse analysis, with particular use of the branch that has its roots in critical discourse analysis. The second portion of the analysis was intended to be a more 'traditional' textual analysis of particular Facebook pages that would be used in the comparative section of the research. However, it was only upon completion of the original proposal and near completion of the first analysis that I accidentally found the page displaying the Facebook Principles. As articulated in the research aims, the ideology and its manifestations on the site is one of the principle foci of this research and consequently I could not disregard a page that clearly outlined the core values and fundamental beliefs of the Facebook developers. Although this page was included in the analysis after the original outline and structure for this research were conceptualised, the Facebook Principles were the ideal text to employ in this analysis: more so than any other text that appears on the site. The Principles contain a

collection of assertions and beliefs that were written by the developers of the site for its users, as opposed to other portions of text that were created by users and may not adequately and consistently reflect the ideological underpinnings of the Facebook site.

## Chapter 5

# METHOD

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### **Multimodal Discourse Analysis – Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen**

The traditional linguistic account is one in which meaning is made once, whereas multimodality argues the presence of multimodal resources that are available in cultures. These resources are then employed in the articulation of meaning in any and every sign, at every level and in any mode. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, p. 4) present four domains of practice in which meaning is dominantly made viz. Discourse, Design, Production and Distribution.

#### *Discourse*

Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) define Discourse as “the socially constructed knowledge of some aspect of reality (where socially constructed refers to knowledge) that has been developed in specific social contexts”. Discourse in this regard can be realised in various ways but exists independently of material manifestations. In this regard, discursive action takes place in, and is a result of; a multiplicity of practices and modes of which lived social action is included. In conceptualising the notion of multiple modes of meaning they, and other writers, assert that any discourse may be realised in more than one way (Luke, 1995; Phillips & Jørgensen, 2002). As a result of this, all aspects of materiality and all the modes deployed in a multimodal object, phenomenon or text contribute to meaning.

When expanding semiosis to include all aspects of materiality, several issues require attention. These include asking what modes are being used and consequently what materials and senses are employed. Furthermore, consideration should be given to how these different modes and materials affect perception and cognition as well as the kinds of meanings produced by these different materials and modes. In addition to these, consideration may be given to the extent to which specific modes have linguistic translations and perhaps even the extent to which the materials used are articulated as modes (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

What then emerges is a far more encompassing analysis of text that is not limited to one or two modes. The potential of the method is further increased by the arrangements (choice, ordering selection) of discourses in texts, objects or practices that produce effects which are considered representations of a particular paradigm or 'ideology' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Because the approach sees texts as ever-changing and ultimately regards semiosis as something that is actioned, 'in practice' ideology serves to aid the discussion and identification of the overarching connections and relationships that ultimately serve in the establishment of a particular end-goal.

### *Design*

Design is seen as a vital component of any multimodal exercise in that it acts as a "means to realise discourses in the context of a given communication situation" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p.4). In addition to this, design as modern abstraction realises the communication in a particular context and changes socially constructed knowledge into social (inter-) action. Similar to discourses, designs may either choose to follow normative constructions and convention or be innovative and even subversive in its approach. The recent drive and emphasis on design (and not specifically in relation to websites) may in part be a product of the awareness of multimodality and a move to theoretically prioritise its attention on communication and representation. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) note how mono-modality was previously assumed and undisputed as language was seen as the central means of communication and representation. Although other modes were acknowledged, these were always seen as extensions of language and were consequently approached in a mono-modal fashion. Areas of design concentration focus on questions relating to the choice of mode and for what purpose. Multimodal arrangements become scripts that can in many cases be elevated to a codified grammar as a set of rules or instructions. These new scripts are by no means stable, but do represent an important part of a process from concept to articulation and production. As a result design can also be defined as all those aspects that together form the "organisation of what is to be articulated into a blueprint for production" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p.4). Mono-modality bore with it an assumption that the move from design to production was itself simply a process of instantiation or realisation. Multimodality, however, sees the shift from a general schema - representing one mode - to its instantiation in another mode as a transformative process in itself that warrants careful consideration and inspection (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Elements of design should include a consideration regarding what aspects of a sequence or structure have been designed and what has been produced as a consequence of those designed elements. This may in cases require a reverse analysis of production to design in order to establish those aspects of the design that are directly constituted in the produced discourse. Design is always contingent either on domain of practice or on the specific stage in the design-production chain. As a result, design is generally discussed in relation to a specific domain of practice, the resources available for the design, and the regularities which surround this both in terms of the modes involved and design practice.

In relation to specific elements of design, Kress & van Leeuwen (2001, p.57) pose the following questions when considering whether an element may be considered a mode: Is it semiotically organised; is it a regularised means of representation; does it have a cultural history which has made it into a representational resource; what are its regularities and how might they be described? Elements of design often have clear functional attributes, but MDA seeks to understand and examine those attributes that are not apparent but nonetheless contribute to the realisation of discourse.

### *Production*

Production can be understood as encompassing the "organisation of the expression, to the actual material articulation of the semiotic event or the actual material production of the semiotic artefact" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p.6). It is within production that the term "medium" bears particular consequence in that "medium" refers to the "material substance drawn into culture and worked over cultural time" (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p.6). Although presented as a separate domain of practice, production can also be construed as the other half of design in that both are domains that ultimately result in the realisation of schemas. In cases when the two are separated, however, design adopts the role of control as it provides the criteria that direct the actions of others. In such cases, the potential for collaboration between discourse, design and production diminishes and there is no longer a requirement for the 'producers' to own the design or to invest themselves in it (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). The value of distinguishing these two domains – however much they may seem to repeat the same detail – is best seen in contexts where meaning is altered as the same design is used in different material productions.

Despite the potential for design to dominate the process of realisation, production plays an independently variable semiotic role in communication that is not adequately described as the realisation of design. As mentioned, production is more concerned with medium as the forms of meaning that production addresses are often difficult to describe in words but are nonetheless perceived distinctly and responded to both cognitively and affectively (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). As a result, production becomes an equally important vessel for the communication of meaning when compared to discourse and design. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) discuss design and production in relation to Barthe's own formulation of 'parasitical' signs which use an already formulated 'literal' or 'denotative' sign and load it with a secondary or connotative meaning that supersedes the literal, denotative meaning into the background. Barthe's concepts of 'connotation' and 'myth' describe this process in which 'myth' refers to the ideological nature of the signified (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Similar to Baudrillard's sign discussed in previous sections, ideology becomes central to the relationship between design and production and, consequently, mode and medium.

### *Distribution*

Distribution is not typically seen as semiotic in traditional linguistic theory. Although it may not be seen to be adding any meaning as it is, it does function at a practical level in the preservation and distribution of communication. However, from a multimodal perspective, distribution becomes a vital tool in considering the positions and roles of various subjects in discourse as practice (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001). Distribution has become an increasingly important domain of practice as a result of the way the Internet and networking have extended our semiotic resources for the production of interactive meanings in many contexts (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001).

Distribution technologies can be presented in varied forms but usually serve one of two functions. Typically, distribution technologies will start off at 'preservation' and/or 'transmission' technologies. Preservation technologies, as the name suggests, function to distribute in the hopes of ensuring the preservation of that communication. Transmission technologies increase spatial reach and thereby decrease distance regardless of the scale. These technologies have a greater degree of impact on interactive meaning as opposed to representative meaning since, as a technology, the potential to effect change in interactions is far greater. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) acknowledge that to use distribution semiotically is accompanied by the awareness that distribution technologies may be used in the service of preservation and transmission, but this in turn results in the transformation of what is recorded or transmitted rather than a mere extension of current representations and interactions.

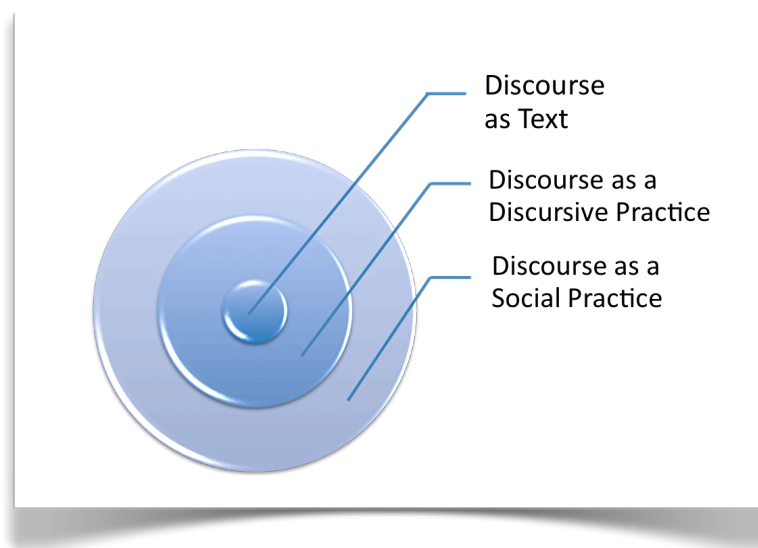
The multimodal discourse analysis of the research was enacted similarly to the CDA approach outlined earlier, except that the focus of the analysis was placed on the architectural and design elements of the site. This included focus on positioning of elements on the page, positioning of elements in relation to each other, structural features, design elements such as colour, shape, form and dimensionality, as well as the representative connections located in the links found on the page.

## **Critical Discourse Analysis – Norman Fairclough**

For the textual analysis of the Facebook website, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was employed. Critical Discourse Analysis refers to a set of theories and methods for the empirical study of the relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in varying social domains. CDA sees discourse as being both socially conditioned and constituted and aims to study discourse as an object of power. In terms of its critique, CDA focuses on the intersection of language, discourse and speech in social structures and as a result makes its application to the study of Facebook ideal as Facebook is constructed through similar processes. In CDA, language-as-discourse is identified as both a form of action that can be used by individuals to change the world, and a form of action that is situated both historically and socially in the midst of a dialectical

relationship with other aspects of social reality. In this way, CDA typifies the kind of research that is absent in the current body of Facebook research. The majority of Facebook research conceptualises Facebook as an extension of social reality rather than a discursive tool employed by its users. Moreover, little research has been done that acknowledges Facebook as a social reality with its own rules and regulations and, indeed, social agents. CDA, furthermore, is employed as a means of critiquing the discursive practices that contribute to the creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups. These are understood in terms of ideological effects in that the role of discursive practice serves in the maintenance of a particular social power (Luke, 1995). Facebook as a social reality is constructed through the online interaction of its users and the discourse that consequently emerges. Other than the program 'strings' that the developers originally constructed to propel Facebook into being, Facebook as a social reality exists purely through discursive practice. In the context of a post-modern society, text, images and representations have all become both the means and object of processes of co-modification and are thus the principal medium of commercial exchange (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Again there is a sense of congruency between the objects Facebook are constructed through (viz. the text, images and structural links) and the contextual framework critical discourse analysis is born from.

Although originally spearheaded by Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak and Teun van Dijk, the approach to analysing discourse outlined by Norman Fairclough will be used in the textual analysis (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000).



*Figure 1: Discourse as text, Discursive Practice and Social practice, adopted from (Fairclough, 2001).*

The above diagram illustrates the three-dimensional framework that Fairclough uses to conceive and analyse discourse. The first dimension, discourse as text, refers to the linguistic structure and features of palpable instances of discourse, such as the particular vocabulary used, grammatical and text structure and the cohesiveness of a sentence (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000, p. 448). This is a unique feature of Fairclough's

conception and is useful for a textual analysis of Facebook in that the wording and choice of terms in structuring the site may have implications for the way users navigate and interact with the site. The second dimension is discourse as a discursive practice and is perhaps the dimension that will be most utilised in the study as it typifies discourse as "something that is produced, circulated, distributed and consumed in society" (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Furthermore, this dimension links a text to its context through manifest intertextuality, and inter-discursivity. The third and final dimension, discourse as social practice, concentrates on the ideological and hegemonic processes in which discourse is embedded. This third and final aspect of discourse is pivotal to Fairclough's conception in that it is here that the ideological qualities of discourse are explored and deconstructed while attempting to understand the numerous ways in which people move through institutionalised discursive regimes, constructing selves, social categories and social realities (Luke, 1995). It is evident how such an approach might serve in the debunking of Facebook's superficiality with the intention of presenting a cohesive and multi-dimensional interpretation of the discursive mechanisms that constitute it as a social reality.

As previously stated, I will adopt the method used by Norman Fairclough (2001) as illustrated in *Language and Power*. The approach presented by Fairclough (2001) consists of three main stages viz. description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social context. It is necessary to note that text does not refer only to the use of words, but refers to 'language in use', namely any instance of written and spoken language that has coherence and coded meanings. This expands the meaning of text to include visual, audio-visual and gestural texts (Fairclough, 2001).

For the description of the text, Fairclough (2001, pp. 92-93) presents a detailed list of questions the researcher should ask at this stage, they are:

*A. Vocabulary:*

1. What experiential values do words have?
2. What relational values do words have?
3. What expressive values do words have?
4. What metaphors are used?

*B. Grammar:*

5. What experiential values do grammatical features have?
6. What relational values do grammatical features have?
7. What expressive values do grammatical features have?
8. How are simple sentences linked together?

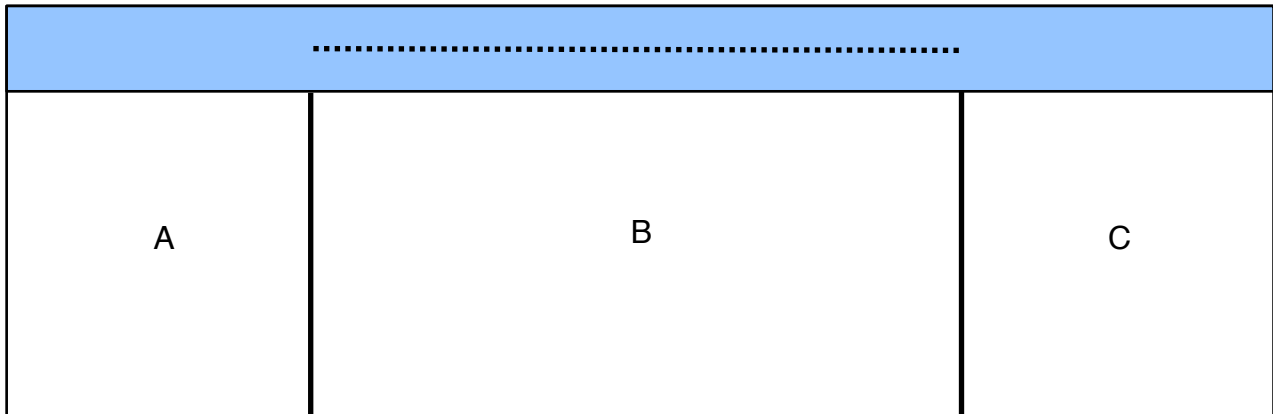
*C. Textual Structures:*



9. What interactional conventions are used?

10. What larger scale structures does the text have?

The above questions will be used to guide the analysis at this part of the study, but may be slightly altered to better suit Facebook's dialectical structure.



The second stage in Critical Discourse Analysis, interpretation, requires the connecting of findings generated in the first part of analysis to the instances of interaction in the data (Fairclough, 2001). With specific regard to Facebook, this is likely to be the parts of the site where interaction takes place (such as the Facebook wall, the status comments, photograph comments) and any other specific tool whereby users are able to communicate with other users. This stage is concerned with the discourses at work in the conversation and looks at how users interpret the content of the interaction, and what assumptions they bring with them to the moments of interaction on the site. This stage is concerned with the identity of the users, how they relate and interact with one another, the topic of interaction and how they negotiate this interaction through the site. The role of language is of paramount importance in this section, as both the language used by the users and the architecture of the site display certain discourses at work and the ideologies inherent in these.

Explanation extrapolated from the findings in description and interpretation include the effects the identified structures have "on the constitution of society" (Fairclough, 2001, p.117). The findings from the previous two stages are considered and used to formulate an understanding about how a society – in this case Facebook – works, draw conclusions regarding how society is constructed, and in turn how those constructions further determine society. Explanation therefore reveals the power relations at work within a society and how these power relations operate ideologically through language. At the same time it investigates whether the language is perpetuating or challenging these dominant ideologies (Fairclough, 2001).

## Chapter 6

# ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

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The original structure of the research required that informed consent be obtained from those whose profile pages were to be used in the principle analysis. However, after further consideration it became apparent that the main elements I needed to analyse were present on my own profile page and I consequently did not require any informed consent.

At the time of submitting this research I have done my best to ensure that my research does not contravene any of the terms and regulations outlined on the Facebook site (Facebook, 2009b). Where possible, I provided detailed descriptions of the site and page layouts, as Facebook does not permit the representation of its site. I have recreated the structural elements of the site, but have done so only for the purpose of this research and not for financial reasons. No specific reference is made to my Facebook friends and the protection of their identity as well as the content shared is ensured. The only text that is directly lifted from the Facebook site is that of the Facebook Principles, but I have acknowledged their origin and have in no way attempted to display this text for any purpose other than academic analysis.

## Chapter 7

# ANALYSIS: FACEBOOK HOME PAGE

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The Facebook website comprises several noteworthy features that have been divided into sections and critically discussed in the following pages. Essentially this process involved the creation of text from imagery and structure, a process that relied on and developed from the researcher's subjective experience and perception of the site.

### **The Blue Navigation Bar**

Upon opening the Home page, users are directed to the News Feed. The blue navigation bar, which runs horizontally from one end to the other, is present consistently throughout the site. This is of importance as the bar is coloured with the identifying brand colour, namely that of blue, which is directly linked to the identification of the site's logo and therefore its identity. Facebook makes use of several shades of colour, but its standard is that shade which is present both as a background to its logo and the foreground of the site. Typically users might experience the blue navigation bar as the foreground of the site, but this is not the case. Websites are only able to represent perspective in two dimensions, typically through layering. Many sites will not differentiate between background and foregrounds, but the Facebook website does so with the strong contrast of the blue navigation bar. If the blue navigation bar is constructed as a background rather than a foreground, this might be in the service of maintaining a perception of reality. Kress and van Leeuwen (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008) argue that, what in language is realised by locative prepositions is visually realised by the formal characteristics that create the contrast between background and foreground. The text and images that appear below the Navigation Bar are under the 'view' of the key-identifying feature of the site, namely its logo. This is located in the top left hand corner of the screen. When users choose to resize the browser window used to view the site, this bar expands over the top of the site to maintain uniform site control. The Facebook navigation bar maintains permanent, uncompromised, control and view of all the site's subsequent posted content and imagery. Unlike its reflected counterpart, the application bar (to be discussed later on), the Blue Navigation Bar scrolls with the

text. In this way, when redirected to their home page upon logging in, users may typically scroll through the content and as a result, the Navigation Bar will move to the top and eventually 'disappear'. This might be considered as a weakening of this position as it may be suggested that true control is maintained through constant visibility. However, if this were the case the Bar would seem to operate as a foreground and it would appear on top of the content as opposed to below it. The power of possessing the background is that Facebook then contains the content (in a space coloured with their chosen identifying blue) and has a more immediate and direct possession over all that appears underneath it. Users must go 'through' Facebook (top-down approach) to access the content. That is not to say that users will experience navigation through the site only in this way, nevertheless, they will experience the permanence of this particular bar throughout the site. As a result of its permanence the Navigation Bar is visible on any page on the site and makes any of the pages it links to permanently accessible.

If the Bar acts as part of a background then users are only able to publish content in the foreground of the site – the 'white canvas' on which they may wish to share aspects of themselves. That is not to say, however, that they are unable to interact with the background of the site. Indeed the Blue Navigation Bar is the primary tool of navigation and consistently appears on every page containing links to the principle pages of the Facebook site.

### *Facebook Logo*

The first link in the Bar is that of the Facebook logo. As the only text appearing as an image link, the Facebook logo acts as the portal to the Home page. Users can click the Facebook icon from any point in the site to be taken directly to the Home page, also known as the News Feed. Facebook uses its logo to associate its corporate identity with the Home page. It does this by using the link as well as the small grey image of a house that appears when the icon is hovered over. Although the shape itself has no real meaning, it acts as a symbol of a home. The symbol depicts a triangle top resembling a roof and a small block beneath it with an open space that represents a doorway. The use of a cut out feature in this icon creates the optical illusion of an open space resembling an open door. Open doors reveal the contents of a room and although there is no room to be seen through the icon, the cut-out space reveals the dark blue of the Facebook brand directly behind it. Users looking through the front door of their 'home' when hovering over the Facebook logo see nothing other than the blue of the navigation bar – an additional pairing of home with the Facebook identity. This desire to pair Facebook with the idea of a home appears elsewhere on the site. The Facebook logo possesses

considerable power over the rest of the pages it appears on. For instance, it is positioned in the top left-hand corner of the site, the typical starting position of western text reading. It is the first from the top and the first from the left, and 'oversees' the development and continuation of all that appears after it (on the right) and below it. One may argue that it is not surprising that the logo would occupy this space, but why is this the case? Why is positioning the identifying aspect in the upper left hand corner more logical rather than anywhere else? As already mentioned, the power possessed by occupying this position is greater than from anywhere else on the site. It is often the first thing seen, the first to occupy one's mind, a constant reminder of 'where' one is and to whom this domain of reality belongs.

Immediately to the right of the Facebook logo is the 'Home' link. The 'Home' link takes users to the News Feed (or Live Feed) and the duplication of a link to the point of origin (where users are redirected upon logging in) is not without significance. Logically speaking it is possible that some Facebook users might not immediately recognise the logo as a link to the Home page. In this instance, users might then understand the use of the word 'home' to be a reference to the point of origin (the first page visible upon entering the site): the News Feed page. The use of the word Home is not unique to Facebook as many websites refer to their page of origin as the Home page. The Home page is also often thought of as the point from which one is best able to navigate to other pages on the site or the page where one is presented with an overview of the contents of the site. Despite its use in Internet jargon, this should not detract from the original use of the term; which becomes particularly poignant with regards to Facebook. A home, in the traditional sense, brings with it connotations of safety, security and a point of origin. Homes act as a meeting place where we entertain friends and family and share information and stories. Families live in homes where they might gather around the dinner table to discuss the events of the day. In addition, a home is the resting place of the smallest form of social community or network, namely the family. A family is one of the smallest, if not the smallest, social group an individual may belong to and a key identifying group for many individuals. In the realm of Facebook, many of these criteria are met.

The Home page is the point where information appears in the News Feed, the point at which we are able to view the recent activity of friends and the first content page of the site. The mere fact that the Facebook logo and the Home link navigate users to the same page may indicate a degree of overlap or contradiction in the meaning communicated. It would be speculative to try and identify the intentions of the Facebook developers in this duplication of these links, but intentions aside, there

are clear consequences to such an overlap. Once users become aware of the dual links to the News Feed, an association between these two links is likely to ensue. Facebook uses its logo, its most important identifying symbol, as a means to bind both the site and its content to the user's subjective understanding and experience of the word 'home'. That is not to say that the developers wished to use this association as a means of imprinting their corporate identity on an existing notion of the word 'home', but rather to create a new real domain where Facebook resides. In an effort to make real of the virtual, the News Feed is, in essence, the hearth of this world that Facebook continuously creates and changes.

Next to the Home link is the Profile link which users employ to access their Profile Page. The Profile Page acts as an image of the user, as viewed through his or her own eyes. The word profile has multiple meanings: it can refer to "a representation of the outline of an object"; the "actual outline or contour of an object"; or, more typical of Internet sites, "a short biographical sketch or character study of a person" (Harvey, 2009). Many Internet sites make use of the word profile in reference to summaries of users, including Internet Dating sites as well as various other online social networks. Despite the likely intention to elicit an understanding of a profile page as a short biographical sketch, the profile link can also be seen to represent the extreme opposite of the Home link. The Home acts as a portal to the rest of the Facebook network, that by accessing the News page, users are permitted to see and follow the interaction of their Facebook Friends. On the other hand, the Profile link takes users to the page that requires engagement with the subjective experience others have in viewing oneself. The News page is how we see others, and the Profile page is how we see ourselves; and consequently how we wish others to perceive us.

Directly next to the profile link is the Friends link which users employ to access their Friends list. The use of the term 'friend' is perhaps the most interesting and significant altered meaning that appears on the Facebook site. Essentially, Facebook uses the term friend to refer to online connections that users make with each other. There is no differentiation between the connections users make on the site itself or those that exist independently of interaction on the site. Some users choose to add applications such as the 'Top Friends' application that enables them to select specific friends whom they acknowledge as higher in their own subjective friendship hierarchy than others. These friends are typically those that they have befriended, or maintain a close friendship with - independently of Facebook. Facebook was not the first site to use the term 'friend' to refer to its connection currency - this term was seen in social networking sites that were launched before Facebook, such as MySpace.

However, despite its origins, the term friend has become synonymous with online social networks like Facebook. The link takes users to an alphabetised list of their friends where they are able to categorise them into customisable sub-lists or delete them if they so wish. The invariable contradiction that arises in the use of the term 'friend' is the subjective and alternate meaning this word carries for individual users. Facebook 'friends' might be construed as mere acquaintances or as very close friends, yet all are labelled friend. In this regard one might question the purpose of assigning a term that describes such an important human relationship to an online connection; but Facebook has, in this way, created a way of viewing society. On Facebook, two categories of people exist: those that you are friends with and those whom you do not know.

Regardless of whether you know other users or not, a request for connection is the same as that of becoming a Facebook friend. If the user is not added as a Facebook friend then Facebook classifies that individual as 'someone you don't know'. This distinction epitomises the dichotomous space users occupy on Facebook. The profile link occupies the second space, an invitation to users to interact with their own representation, to construct a likeness of themselves for others to view. Directly next to the profile is the link to a user's Facebook Friends – the connections with whom their Facebook self is shared and those that the user in turn has access to.

The Inbox link provides access to a feature on the Facebook service where individuals may send private messages to friends and groups. Although the messages may be sent to a collection of people, they are received in the Inbox as a personal message that only that particular person can view. The Inbox operates much like an e-mail service for Facebook users in that messages are sent, received and deleted at will. Similar to an e-mail application, users are notified in the blue Navigation Bar as to the number of new messages they have. Interestingly, this is the only way in which the Navigation Bar changes in format. When a new message is received, a number will appear next to the Inbox link and is used to indicate the number of new (unread) messages. Furthermore, if the user 'hovers' over the link with their mouse a further two options appear, one for composing a message and another which can link the user to the inbox. Although the use of the word 'inbox' is typically associated with e-mail facilities, Facebook seemingly chose to refer to this portion of the Facebook service as either 'Message Centre' or simply 'messages'. Inbox is a direct reference to the virtual folder where incoming messages or mail is received, and is consequentially associated with the passive act of reception. In using the term 'Inbox' Facebook again highlights potential uses and purposes of the site, as well as reinforcing the added connectivity users have. The receiving of messages is emphasised

over the sending of messages, perhaps as a way to highlight an additional way users can be connected. In addition, the space the Inbox link in the Navigation Bar occupies is of considerable importance suggesting this is one of the principle features provided by the Facebook service.

On the right-hand side of the Blue Navigation Bar are three additional 'links'. The first link is titled according to the user's name, reflecting the name used on the Facebook account. For example, if Mary Anne James signs up as 'Mary James' and omits her middle name, her account name (Mary James) will appear as the first link as opposed to her full name. The exact purpose of this link, however, is questionable in that users clicking here are redirected to their Profile page again. Since the 'Profile' link clearly relates and indicates the potential destination page, the reason for including an additional link is significant. The Profile link, as previously mentioned, is a reference to users Profile page - a subjective construction of the self through the lens of Facebook. By including another reference to the Profile page, Facebook is again emphasising the importance of this particular aspect of the social network, but this time it is reinforcing the Profile page, not just as a subjective project of the self, but also as a representation of how others see the user. The use of user's name is designed to elicit a personal, subjective awareness of self. This is not for the user to understand themselves subjectively, but rather as a being that others might perceive. Names are used to refer to individuals, not in terms of a subjective stream of consciousness, but for the purpose of being othered: to permit individuals to refer to another individual with ease. This results in a construction of the Facebook user as a being-for-others.

Directly next to the user's 'name' link is a settings link which users employ to access their account and privacy settings. This is an administrative tool in that use of this link requires Facebook account holders to understand the customisability of their account and privacy settings. On the 16th December 2009, Facebook made significant changes to their privacy settings (Harvey, 2009). In the past, Facebook users were only able to change settings for networks or groups of individuals, but the new settings enable users to specify who is able to view each photo, video, status update or any other individual piece of content uploaded to the website (Editor, 2009). As a consequence, users now have more control over the viewership of their Facebook activity and although one might be led to believe that the purpose of this greater control is to increase the privacy of Facebook content, this is not necessarily the case. Facebook users are able to specify who has access to particular sets of information, but Facebook makes suggestions by selecting certain options as default (Facebook, 2010). Facebook's principles state that part of its purpose is to render the world more open and



transparent (Editor, 2009). In the face of this statement, one might ask what role privacy has in the realisation of this goal?

Although Facebook would argue that users are free to change these settings at any point, many have clicked through the 'privacy wizard' with new more 'open' settings (Barnett, 2009). Privacy has become a concern for many Facebook users due to the nature of the information shared. Users are indirectly encouraged to share personal details (from their book interests to their relationship status) as well as contact information. As a result, the degree of access other users have to an account are important. By default, users accounts are published as public listings in major search engines such as Google. To use a previous example, the 'Mary James' public listing on Facebook would appear in Google search results if someone were to type this name into the search engine. She is able to change this feature in the settings tab, but users are often unaware of this feature. Google has indicated that the search-ability of Facebook accounts will be extended to include status updates for the social network as well as its rival MySpace (Barnett, 2009). This will mean that when searching for a particular topic on Google, real-time updates from a variety of social networks will appear along with the usual listings (2006). The implications of this are considerable, in that users will no longer be sharing their status updates with a relatively small community but with the world-wide web community at large. The importance of the settings option in the Navigation Bar therefore becomes even more significant in the face of these changes.

The Logout button appears next to the settings link and ends the user's experience with Facebook. The presence of this 'button' here is unsurprising as most users would already be aware of the risks of not logging out from their Facebook account. Facebook exists as a site independently of 'logging in', but it is through the process of logging-in that one gain's access to their version of the site. Unlike a typical website, where content is posted and visible by any individual who visits that site, Facebook is an information storage facility and the information displayed differs from person to person. The process of logging in ensures individuals receive their personal version of the site. In this regard, Facebook is different for all who use it and is consequentially experienced differently by each user. Each Facebook account holder has a different collection of friends, which in turn means they will have a unique News and Live Feed on their Home page. They will receive different notifications and view a unique collection of photographs. Again, although the content posted is stored in a 'virtual-vat', this information is used for only a select number of people. Networks and connections are the principles on which Facebook is structurally dependant, and the content shared and viewed

depends on those connections. Users log into the 'service' and provide personal details so that they might access the content relevant to them. Facebook performs a 'service' for its users, one that stores and presents information about users connections and acquaintances in an orderly and simple format that can be accessed at any point in time.

Next to the Logout button is a text field with a search function. The search feature is the principle means through which users are able to connect with other users and become 'Facebook Friends'. Although there are other means through which to do this, such as the 'Facebook Friend Finder' (a service that provides Facebook with permission to import e-mail contacts and search for users by their e-mail addresses), the search field is better suited to finding both newly made acquaintances and old friends. A user types in the name of an individual which Facebook then uses to search for accounts matching that name. Facebook does not merely provide a list of users matching that name at random, but rather orders these. Typically, matches with a connection to the user are displayed first and if there are none of these then results are listed according to networks (such as countries). In addition, users are able employ the search function to access existing Facebook friends with greater ease. Typing an existing Facebook Friend's name into the search field will bring up a small link (which includes a photo) to that individual's profile page. This makes accessing existing Facebook Friends much easier and quicker as not all one's 'friends' activities will appear in the News or Live Feeds. The text field may also be employed to search for a range of additional Facebook services including events, groups and photographs. In using a search function, the randomness of access to another profile is removed and users have added connectivity with each other. Users may typically browse Facebook Friend's Profile pages by clicking on links that appear in the News Feed, however, by accessing a profile through the search bar the user willingly and deliberately seeks to access that profile, and there is therefore a marked degree of premeditated intent.

There are additional features to the Navigation Bar that are of interest. First, there is a distinction drawn between the four links on the left (Home, Profile, Friends and Inbox) and those on the right ('Name', Settings, Logout and Search Field) in that the links appearing on the left are displayed in bold white text, whereas text on the right is displayed without bolding. Bold text is typically used in word processing as a means of emphasising text and there is perhaps a similar rationale in this case. The use of bold text separates and, more importantly, emphasises the links on the left from those on the right. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) propose that positioning in images often indicates a temporal pattern. Items placed on the left may indicate a sense of permanence and are ontologically a

priori whereas items appearing on the right may represent novelty and transience. This is compounded by a clear separation in positioning between these two sets of links. The links on the left are those that are employed to navigate and are directly used to experience the site. These serve to interact and share information on Facebook, which ultimately governs the production of site content. The links on the right, however, are mainly employed to manage the administrative aspects of Facebook. These links are separate to the content that appears in the main body and allow users to manage their experience on the site. In this regard, the left contains features that bring the user into the 'reality' of Facebook, whereas those on the right remind users that this world is actually a constructed one.

All the features of the Navigation Bar have the appearance of permanence, yet some are able to interact with the user to alter his or her experience in a manner resembling a subjective experience.

The remainder of the Facebook Home page is divided into three sections, henceforth referred to Sections A, B and C.

## **Section A – Lists**

The section that appears on the far left hand side contains links to a variety of Facebook features (or applications) as well as variations of the Facebook Home page. These vary according to what the user employs or has made active on his or her page. Facebook users are able to utilise a variety of applications or features to categorise and order their connections, such as by network, through the creation of lists. Section A changes according to each user's particular account settings and usage of the site. A user with multiple networks will have a different default list to a user who has only one. For the purpose of this analysis I will be referring to the default list that appears on my own Facebook Home page. The top link is titled 'News Feed' and when it is in view, it is highlighted in a variation of Facebook-blue and neatly boxed. Directly below this link are additional 'links' that relate to the viewing of the News Feed. These additional links are essentially a list of custom formats or filters that, when selected, will allow the user to view a particular set of posts. For example, a 'status update' link essentially will – when selected – reveal all posts made that are status updates. Directly below the 'News Page' link, is a 'network' link.

Facebook is grouped according to networks. Users are encouraged to join networks delineated in a variety of ways such as by university, place of employment and other institutions, as well as by

employer. Users are able to join a number of networks, but one is typically selected as the principle or 'default' network. Networks may be thought to operate as a form of taxonomy in that users are subsequently able to be categorised by network. When users search for other users, the results are typically displayed in a hierarchical manner listing results from the user's own network first. This is a form of social organisation, but one that does not evolve naturally and is rather preordained through the construction of these networks or categories. The realisation that the networks form a part of a preordained social organisation suggests that Facebook imposes a form of authority over users. The notion of authority or power will be discussed in more detail later on. Unlike networks, which users join voluntarily and are universal category systems, lists are created by individual users for their own purposes and are not visible to others. Their primary purpose seems to be that of grouping people in a way that is meaningful for the user in question and does not require any engagement or knowledge from those Facebook Friends who are contained in the list. For example, 'Mary Jane' may choose to create a list for the Facebook Friends she went to High School with. Each one of these individuals is then manually added to that list – a deliberate and purposeful act. The list is then easily accessed from the left panel. Lists are used not only used to present information about individuals but again as a means of categorising. Users can access various 'lists' under the list tab which then contains the lists they have created themselves as well as a means of viewing their 'pages', 'sms subscriptions' and 'friends'. Section A acts similarly to the Blue Navigation Bar in that it provides the user with a 'menu' of sorts – a means through which various components of the site are accessible. However, unlike the Blue Navigation Bar, these options tend to focus more on organisational features as opposed to the navigation of the site. Additionally, Section A will change in line with the page access so that the options that appear to the user in this panel are related to the content that appears in Section B. Section A is unlike the Blue Navigation Bar in that it is dependent on the user's experience and interaction with the site. Although a default list is present the first time the user logs in, this list will change and 'respond' in lieu of the choices users make whilst navigating the site. Section A serves a somewhat complimentary function in adding to the functionality and usability of Section B content. This content, and its features, are the principle reasons users are motivated to interact with it.

## **Section B – Principle Content**

Section B houses the majority of the content of the site and all the posted content. It is in this section that the majority of the interaction between Facebook users takes place. Upon logging in users are typically taken to the New Feed page or Home page as described. Directly next to the title 'News Feed' that appears in Section B is a link titled 'View Live Feed' with a real-time numeric indicator adjacent displaying the number of posts that have been made since the user last viewed this feed. The content viewed is similar to that of the News Feed, but there is no delay in the appearance of the content so viewers are able to see posted content immediately after it is posted. Part of the 'allure' of the 'Live Feed' view is that users are able to see which of their Facebook Friends is online at the same time as they are. As a result, there is bound to be a greater sense of connectedness because viewers, aware or not, are not only receiving 'shared' thoughts, but are sharing the experience of using the site. Users are therefore connected not only through the connections of the site, but also through the shared experience of navigating Facebook. There is a distinction made between these two different formats of viewing posted content. A small icon accompanies each to its left, which serves to describe the title in a visual manner.

The News Feed icon is one that resembles a newspaper page but is styled in a way that has dramatically simplified the image and impression. 'News Feed', accompanied by this small newspaper icon, represents a traditional and typified way of receiving 'news' or information. Despite the advent of media and television, written news in the form of printed newspapers still exists and is a globally recognised method of accessing information. However, when the Live Feed is selected, revealing the latest posts that were not visible in the News Feed, the icon changes.

The Live Feed icon is also stylised but displays three small coloured boxes with adjacent lines. The symbolism here is found in several word processing applications (such as Microsoft Word and Apple Pages) and is typically used to denote bullet points used to create lists. Although the content of the two feeds is very similar (other than for the immediacy with which users are able to see the posts), these icons are fundamentally different. The 'list' icon of the Live Feed also resembles the blog format adopted by Facebook. The small blocks can be construed as symbols for the thumbnail pictures that appear in a post and the line denotes the subsequent content. If this were the case, again there is an association that follows which pairs the immediacy of the Live Feed with Facebook. This pairing suggests that the use of the Live feed, as a more immediate way of accessing information, is realised through a feature that defines the site.

Directly underneath the News Feed title is the user's Post-Bar. The bar is coloured in a light grey that distinguishes it from the rest of the content page, which is coloured white. In it, the user will see a thumbnail version of his or her profile picture, as well as a text field with default text asking: "What's on your mind?" This acts as an invitation to users to share their thoughts with their Facebook Friends and those who can view their profiles. Below this are a variety of small icons representing a range of media formats that users can 'post' to their profiles. These include photographs, video, external web pages, events and third-party application-related formats. Users can update their status by entering text into the field and immediately 'sharing' this post with other users or, if they so choose, they can attach a photograph with their update. To 'post' this information or 'share it', as Facebook describes, users are required to click the 'share' button. Unlike the rest of the links or content of the site, the share button appears in white bold text and is displayed prominently. Instead of the blue text against a white background, the button is coloured in the prized blue and is bordered using a darker shade of blue. The use of a thin off-white line at the top of the button provides a somewhat 3-D effect. Although an argument may be put forward for the aesthetic appeal of designing the button in this manner, one cannot deny the importance of the button and its subsequent emphasis. The sharing of information represents the core of Facebook activity. It is the sharing of information and content that mobilises the site and motivates users to employ it. Facebook's one-line description states "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life" highlighting the core tenets of the Facebook experience, namely that of 'sharing' information and 'connecting' with others (Facebook, 2009c). It becomes evident then, that these two are the foci of the site and, as a result, all direct manifestations and points of realisation of these foci throughout Facebook become critical to its user-ship. The 'share' button is the principle means through which the first tenet of the site is exercised. As a result the 'share' button becomes a goal-point at which Facebook's purpose is realised. It is unsurprising then that the button that performs an activity realising the site's purpose and promise to its users is styled similarly to the logo – the simplest and strongest representing symbol of Facebook. In sharing similar identifying features, the 'share' button becomes an extension of the Facebook identity and can be incorporated into that identity. Throughout the site, there are certain features or technologies that are clearly aligned with the overall designed identity. The 'share' button epitomises this pattern through its dual realising powers of identity-alignment and its role as a point at which the Facebook promise is realised.

Directly adjacent to the 'share' button on its left is a small, stylised image of a lock. This is a new feature of Facebook<sup>2</sup> that provides users with additional options regarding the visibility of their status updates or quickly posted content. Previously, users were only able to share their thoughts with those individuals they were friends with; now they can specifically select with whom they wish to share their update with viz. 'everyone', 'friends of friends', 'only friends' or a custom option which allows users to select groups of people or particular individuals as well as selecting individuals they wish their post to be hidden from (Nortjé, 2008). The addition of this added feature indicates the extent to which privacy has become a concern for Facebook users.

The text field containing "What's on your mind?" is employed as an invitation to users to share their thoughts, and makes use of the only possessive pronoun on the site. It is only in this box that users are not referred to by name. This is an interesting occurrence in that the use of the possessive pronoun speaks to the user directly, acknowledging his or her embodied presence. The use of the possessive pronoun *your* also sets up a distinction between that particular user and their Facebook Friends. By referring again directly to the subjectivity of the user, Facebook constructs a distinction between what Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) refer to as the 'actor' and the 'goal'. The actor is the one who performs the action whereas the goal is the one on whom that action is performed. Although this distinction between actor and goal is taken from an image, a similar process ensues from the use of this possessive pronoun. Users are separated from their constituents and their role as actors is featured through the 'sharing' of information. Unlike the example provided by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), in this case there is a contradiction in roles as users simultaneously occupy both roles. At the point at which the user acknowledges what is required of him or her, that person is logged in, and as a result, forms part of other users feeds. He or she is simultaneously an actor and an audience. In addition, the use of the word *your* as a possessive pronoun calls attention to the user's possession of his or her thoughts. By sharing this information with their Facebook community, a question remains as to what right to ownership that user has over their own posted content.

Although the question "What's on your mind?" has no real link to a particular time frame, it asks users to respond to the question based on what they are thinking at a particular instance. The user reads the question, internalises it and is required to respond accordingly based on what is 'on' his or her mind at that moment. This process essentially captures the user's consciousness and documents

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<sup>2</sup> Added December 2009

it by posting it on a public domain where others are able to view it. This process is one of the most significant and meaningful experiences that occur on the site. Users are given the opportunity to become real – or at least be perceived as such – in performing an action that has real consequences on the site and is displayed as such. As viewers, they are part of a particular community that acts as individuals who receive posted content, but this role is one of relative anonymity. The action of posting content or updating one's status transforms the viewer into a subject and the object of other viewer's attention. Their post becomes visible to their Facebook Friends and they are presented as a fellow Facebook user, thereby authenticating the experience on the site and validating the entire process from viewer to creator.

### *Main Body*

Content on the Facebook Home Page appears in chronological order, with the most recent information appearing at the top. Users scroll down the page to review posts and if they wish to view additional posts they can select the 'older posts' button located at the bottom of the page. Posts take on a variety of formats but there are a few specific formats that are particularly noteworthy. Since Facebook is utilised not only by individuals but also by corporate, political and social organisations alike, some of what may appear in users feeds may be information regarding these organisations. What is of primary interest to this analysis, however, are posts made by 'individuals' since these represent posts that are made by embodied subjects as opposed to individuals on behalf of greater groups. Typically, if a Facebook user updates his or her status, that post will appear in the News Feed of his or her Facebook Friends. When this occurs the 'update' is packaged in a particular way for viewing. The post always contains the thumbnail version of the user's profile picture, which then appears in the top left hand corner. The user's name appears adjacent to the picture in 'Facebook Blue', followed by the user's update in grey text. Underneath the update, Facebook will include either the time at which the update was made or the time elapsed since then. A 'Comment' and a 'Like' feature will accompany this information. If the update was made via an alternative medium, such as Facebook Mobile or one of the third-party applications used on the site, a small icon will be added to the time as well as the format itself. For example, if 'Mary Jane' updates her status as "Mary Jane is watching TV" from her mobile phone, an icon of a mobile phone will appear below the update followed by the time elapsed since the post was made and the device type, which, in this case, would appear as "4 hours ago via Mobile Web". Next to this information are two buttons viz. 'Comment' and 'Like'. These two features perform functions as their titles suggest: they allow users



to 'Comment' on various posts as well as communicate that they 'like' the post. The 'Like' feature (or link) is accompanied by a small thumbs-up icon, providing visual confirmation of the link's purpose. When a user selects this feature, his or her name will appear next to the thumbs-up along with written confirmation of their 'like' – "Mary Jane likes this", for example. The comment feature is the more dynamic of these two, as users are able to provide feedback or share their own thoughts with other users regarding posted content. Typically, comments are designed to refer to the post they are attached to – as the comments appear directly under a specific post – but often these comments may develop into 'conversations' between users that may in turn have nothing to do with the original post. An individual may post a status update and another user may comment on that update. Since the original user is permitted to comment on their own updates, this provides an added degree of connectivity between Facebook users. Additionally, conversations may develop between multiple users aside from the first user who made the original comment. Comments always contain a small thumbnail picture of users as well as the time at which these comments were made. The comments are made in many ways to resemble the original post in format, except that, to distinguish the comments from the posts themselves, they are made smaller and are positioned on a pale blue background that is positioned in such a manner so that the block appears to originate from the original post. If multiple comments or 'Likes' are made, some of the comments are then hidden (but may be retrieved by clicking the 'view all' link) and Facebook then provides a summative account of the number of 'likes' and comments the post has received. The comment feature acts similarly to the "What's on your mind?" question, in that it is a call to interact with the site and its users. Essentially, Facebook designs the position of the viewer by creating a means through which individuals are able to further interact. The 'Comment' button acts as a stimulus and the writing of the comment, as the desired response. Facebook presents similar stimuli that are designed to elicit a 'desired effect', namely a response from the reader or subject. The comment feature acts as a forum in that status updates can be viewed immediately and interaction can ensue from there onwards. Although Facebook does make use of a feature where users are able to communicate with each other in a chat environment, the interaction is not concretised in the same fashion as the comment feature. A comment is posted, similarly to an update, and as a result a user's subjectivity becomes a part of a greater whole that is contained in that post and its subsequent updates. It becomes real, not only for that person, but also for all the individuals who constitute that person's Facebook Friends. Furthermore, the concretisation of that comment brings with it an altered sense of belonging. Comments appear directly underneath users' posts and are attached to those posts. Other users who

read the post will also see the comments and identify the existence of a connection or relationship between the commentator and the user who made the original post. The transparency of this connection validates both the user and the commentator in that they have both successfully filled their roles and elicited the 'desired response'.

One of the 'native'<sup>3</sup> Facebook applications is that of photograph albums and image sharing. Users are able to upload their own photographs to the site and store them in various albums that their Facebook Friends are able to access and view. Albums have customisable privacy settings, but are generally either made accessible to all Facebook users or to just the album creator's Facebook Friends. When users upload their photographs to Facebook, the photographs appear as posts in the News Feed of individuals who are permitted access via the privacy settings. Unlike thumbnails and profile pictures, published photographs are framed with a white border. The white border resembles the kind often used in printed or professional photographs, and the addition of this white border creates a clear distinction between photographs that are published as part of albums and those that are not, such as profile pictures. Published photographs are always preceded by text. Either they will appear below the name of the individual or organisation that published the photograph or they will be succeeded by text of another form. Uploaded photographs often make use of a 'tagging' feature. The 'tag' feature essentially allows users to correlate individuals in the photographs with their profile pages. As a result, Facebook Friends who are tagged in photographs, appear in the user's Home Feed with the title above stating "Mary James was tagged in a photo..." Like other status updates, users are able to comment or 'like' specific photographs or the album as a whole when published. The addition of this feature, as well as the photograph border around the pictures, acts as a means of imposing reality on the viewers. Photographs are not merely web images that may or may not be authentic, but rather direct representations of the user and of the reality Facebook seeks to represent. The fact that text is always used to precede the photographs may also suggest the primacy of the written word above the use of images.

Facebook is premised on facilitating communication and the principle means through which this is achieved is language. Despite the addition of multiple modalities in the use of images, videos and other means of communicating, the written word still reigns supreme on Facebook. This emphasis, however, suggests a particular way of interpreting social structure and reality. Facebook, through its prioritising of language over the visual, communicates a particular subjectivity that users may well

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<sup>3</sup> Application developed by Facebook

adopt. The Facebook logo itself provides an indication of this as it is composed of text instead of the combination of text and graphics which many corporations and organisations use in their logos. Interestingly, however, there exists a tension between the domains of the visual and that of language. The use of the white-framed border suggests that the images operate as a direct link between what occurs in 'reality' and what occurs on Facebook. Facebook, although designed to extend our subjective realities, could well be interpreted as fictional or virtual. The use of a photograph, often construed as a representation of truth, acts as a way of reconnecting with the user's sense of reality and grounding the occurrences on Facebook. In this regard, the visual seems to supersede the written, yet structurally this is not permitted and text always precedes the visual. Perhaps, despite its use of varying modalities, Facebook cannot escape the very substance that composes it: to essentialise Facebook would mean to realise that its core is compiled of nothing other than text. All applications, web sites and digital media are realised through code that consists of text, which in turn can be ultimately reduced to binary code. This is perhaps a paradox that exists within Facebook in that all that is visual is ultimately reducible to text and written word.

Apart from the publication of status updates and images, users are also notified as to the activity of some of their Facebook Friends. One example is the notification that appears when users make and accept Facebook Friends. For example if 'Mary Jane' were to befriend 'Alistair Smith', and a friend request is accepted by either side, a 'connection' is made, that might appear in Mary Jane's Facebook Friends' Home pages as "Mary Jane and Alistair Smith are now friends." The purpose of this notification in the feeds of Facebook is not directly provided, but it may serve multiple purposes. For one, the notification serves the interest of the viewer and permits users to follow the activity of their Facebook Friends. It also serves in mapping social relationships on and off Facebook. My previous research indicated that Facebook users might use the site as a form of monitoring (for instance, the addition of Facebook Friends or any games they might play) since they are given access to their friends' activities on the site, (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). However, there is more to this monitoring when viewed from a critical perspective. Users may see the addition of "Mary Jane is now friends with Alistair Smith" or "X is now friends with Y" as a notification that infringes on their privacy. Although the subject has the choice of removing the publication of this notification, they can only do this once the original act has been presented to the network/s and made visible. This process is similar to the one described by Hodge and Kress (1978, 1993) as the 'transformation of the nominalisation' – the change of a clause into a nominal. The notification of the event acts as the clause, but embedded in this notification are the names and links to the individuals' profiles.

Essentially this event becomes a 'naming', where users are exposed to individuals they might not have previously known. One might say that this occurs in day-to-day life, in that we are often exposed to new acquaintances through our own network of acquaintances or friends. On Facebook however, this process starts as a notification and embedded in this is the communication of activity on behalf of the user. 'X is now friends with Y' defines X through an activity and Y becomes a real subject in the eyes of A, the viewer. This process has been described as an example of the preference for the 'anthropomorphic metaphor of birth, growth, and death' (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008). Facebook censors its artificial existence by entrenching itself in the power of discourse. It becomes real as it seeks out meaning and makes that meaning its own. People have subjective experiences of what they understand as life and reality, and by recreating this 'natural' process in the creation of a connection, people then see the activity represented as 'real' and 'true'. This is the power of social networks in that they have the ability to portray a subjective experience as an objective fact that is universally disseminated. Additionally the notification is not presented as simple text alone, but the names in the notification appear in Facebook Blue (as do all names in the Home page), indicating that text operates as a link to the individual's Profile page. Simplistically, the motivation behind the use of an alternate colour is that of differentiating that piece of text from the rest of the text it appears with. Blue is also the traditional colour used to indicate links on web pages. However, the text is coloured in Facebook Blue, unlike the grey used in the rest of the notification. Users recognise the difference between the texts and perhaps understand (or at least quickly learn) that the text in blue operates as a link to the individual's Profile page. The link acts as a portal, a gateway, to a moment when the representation of that individual is realised. Users of Facebook are presented with this immediately; the distinct colour acts as a symbol of accessibility that communicates to users, albeit indirectly, the immediacy with which these individuals are accessible. Furthermore, the fact that these names are coloured in Facebook Blue identifies and binds that portal with the site's principle colour. Regardless of intent, the use of the Facebook Blue acts a referent to the Logo, identifying that action and operation with something that Facebook is able to perform. Independently of Facebook, users are not able to access their friends in such a manner – to review their activity and new connections. This is an ability that is inextricably bound to the Facebook experience and the service it provides.

As well as acting as a referent to the Facebook experience, the notification acts as a means of bracketing real authors and real readers. Again, however, there is a paradox that ensues from this. In reading this notification the user identifies him or herself as a viewer, a surveyor of the Facebook

realm. However, in commenting or by using the site, that person is simultaneously an author and adds to the experience of their own Facebook Friends' and networks. Again the context of production is shared with the context of reception and users are required to navigate their dual responsibilities simultaneously. A user is unable to be a reader if he or she is not an author first, and this is the basis through which Facebook operates. Even if users are not heavily active in updating their status', when they originally join the site they are invited to 'create' their profile, which requires some form of description, and this ultimately begins the process of authorship.

## **Section C – Notifications**

Section C, similar to Section A, seems to respond and change in line with the way users navigate and interact with the site. This seems to take one of three various forms. Either Section C is made invisible (such as when users access their account settings), or it contains advertisements for profile pages, or it takes a list form when on the Home page.

### *Request Component*

Once again, this section is broken up into components, a method Facebook evidently favours. The first section appearing at the top is titled 'Requests' and displays incoming notifications regarding invitations to the user for a variety of things. For one, this is where the user is informed of a 'friend request'. A 'friend request' appears in this section when a user chooses to add another user to his or her network of Facebook friends. When this occurs the other user is notified as to this request and must either accept or reject it. This is a process from which considerable meaning is derived. When a friend request is made, that user is introduced to a character or persona that acts as a representation of a real person. This could either be someone they have met face-to-face or it could be a complete stranger. Regardless of the presence of previous contact or not, this initial introduction informs the user that this 'individual' exists and is represented in the Facebook realm. The acceptance or rejection of this 'individual' is an active process that involves the acknowledgment of an alternative subject in that the profile from whence the request originated embodies the subjectivity of another individual. The Facebook user becomes aware of another user, not merely through interaction on the site, but through a seemingly 'direct' means of contact with that person; even though this communication is mediated through the Facebook platform. Facebook users will typically interact with the site and content in a way that their Facebook Friends will view. However, once a Facebook

Friend has been made, the user may then choose to communicate directly with that 'friend', thus creating alternative means of interaction. The issuing of this request acts as a means of inviting that person to join a 'fold' of sorts – to become a part of another user's collective – that allows for direct communication with other individuals in a more accepted environment. Prior to creating this connection, individuals are able to send direct messages to other users with whom they are not Facebook Friends. It is, however, only through the 'befriending' of Facebook individuals that commenting and wall communication becomes more 'acceptable' in terms of Facebook etiquette. Like societies, Facebook is governed by social norms and requirements that are enforced by the site itself. The presence of these norms is evident through the availability of features that allow users to report other users for violating the Facebook Terms and Conditions and by the recent addition of the 'Facebook Principles' (Facebook, 2009a). The consequence of this is a form of policing of the Facebook site and its 'citizens' who accept these terms in exchange for user-ship when first joining the site.

In addition to receiving 'friend' requests, users may also receive invitations to events and invitations related to other third-party applications viz. those applications that are not made by the Facebook developers. The request panel is clearly delineated from other panels by the use of bold text in the title viz. 'Requests', as well a grey horizontal line underneath this title followed by the requests underneath. Users who make use of several third-party applications may in turn be inundated with requests as these requests are automatically generated by the application and not as a result of another user's direct activity. In this case a few will be displayed followed by an 'Other Requests' link. Requests are categorised according to the kind of application they are related to and each application will display an accompanying icon. The icon is generally one that is related to application and, like icons in general, serves the purpose of representing that application or feature in a graphic form. Each request line acts as a link that takes users to a page where they can review each request, obtain more information on it and then decide whether to accept or reject that request. Third-party application requests will often require users to navigate to that application where the invitation or request is then finalised and the user informed of such. The request component may be construed as means of mapping one's user-ship progress. Requests act similarly to notifications as they alert users to external activity on Facebook. However, whereas the notifications are primarily informative in nature, requests are cues to further Facebook interaction, whether it is through the creation of new connections (accepting a Facebook Friend request), using Facebook as a means to manage events, or increasing entertainment value (accepting requests for third-party applications).

### *Suggestion Component*

Directly underneath the requests component is a similarly structured component titled 'Suggestions'. As its name implies, the 'Suggestions' component is a list of suggestions created by Facebook for its users. All suggestions that appear under this component aim to either provide users with new connections or to encourage interaction or communication with existing connections. Each 'Suggestion' will take the form of a horizontal rectangle. This separates each suggestion from another, allowing the user to easily distinguish between each of the components. Suggestions are presented based on the unique profile of the user and are accompanied by the suggested user's name in bold Facebook Blue and their Profile picture thumbnail. Directly underneath the suggested user's name is the suggestion itself. For existing connections this might appear as "write on her wall", "reconnect with him" or "you haven't spoken on Facebook lately". All of these suggestions are provided as commands to users. The process through which these suggestions are provided is not clear-cut, but one can assume that they are presented as a result of programming or algorithms that employ user-ship in order to assess which connections users do not frequently contact and make suggestions based on that. Another suggestion typically presented is one related to the creating of new connections. Again the use of an algorithm may be employed to assess possible new connections based on existing ones. Facebook might then present an unknown individual as a suggestion based on the presence of twenty-one existing connections (for example). The suggestion then appears as "Add as Friend". Each suggestion is accompanied by a representative image in the form of a corresponding icon. Yet again, there is a link between text and visual. The icon takes the form of an outlined person, coloured in a version of Facebook Blue. This outline is accompanied by an addition symbol (+) and the numeral 1. Symbolically, the image communicates the addition of a 'person' to an existing collection of sorts. That external person will be connected to the user in question, joining his or her 'collection' of 'friends'. The command text always appears in Facebook Blue and communicates to the user the presence of the link or portal that makes the act possible. The user may choose to activate (click) the link present in the suggested user's name, or the command link, both of which will take the user to the suggested user's profile page. The use of colour in the text again acts as a means of highlighting the different roles each text plays. Text appearing in blue, similar to the main body, acts as an indicator of user-ship which informs the user that the act of selecting that link will 'transport' them to another profile, one they may choose to interact with or act-upon. Grey text, on the other hand, serves merely to provide information and does not aid the user in navigating the site – its purpose is somewhat secondary. Although, structurally, the

'suggestion' component is very similar to the 'requests' one, there is one noticeable difference. Both components have on the right hand side a 'view all' link that navigates the user to a detailed list of requests or suggestions. Interestingly, as of January 2010, this 'view all' was changed to a 'see all' link. The changing of the term view to see suggests Facebook identified the word see as more appropriate or better suited to a particular user-ship than view. The word see has more definitions than view and is perhaps a more commonly used term than view. The Oxford Online English Dictionary defines view as "to inspect or examine in a formal or official manner; to survey carefully or professionally; to review", "to inspect or examine (records, accounts, etc.) by way of check or control" or "to survey or explore (a country, coast, etc.)" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008). See however is defined as "to perceive (light, colour, external objects and their movements) with the eyes, or by the sense of which the eye is the specific organ"; "to behold (visual objects) in imagination, or in a dream or vision" or "to perceive objects by sight" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2008). These definitions suggest that the word see is more concerned with describing the act of perception, that of using our faculty of sight to directly perceive a visual stimulus. There is a greater sense of directness and authenticity in the process of 'seeing' as opposed to 'viewing'. The use of the word view seems to connote a greater degree of formality and judgement as opposed to pure sensory perception.

The 'suggestion' component differs from the 'requests' component in that it displays a small grey x on the left hand side of each suggestion. The x acts as a cancellation option, in that the user employs this x to 'cancel' or conveniently reject the suggestion without having to navigate to another page. One may ask why a similar feature was not added to the 'requests' component so that users could remove requests without having to access the requests page. Unlike the requests page, the 'suggestion' component does not link to a suggestion page but to a page where users may enter information as well as review suggestions. This page is titled "Find people you know on Facebook" and again is composed as a command and is also an ambiguous statement. Although the intended meaning is designed to instruct users to find people on Facebook whom they have met or know independently of the site, another reading of this instruction could be one where users are instructed to find people they know are definitely using the site, even if they are not known independently of the site. Interestingly, whereas the title that appears on the page is "Find people you know on Facebook", the title appearing on the HTML page itself is "Find your friends on Facebook" (Facebook, 2009a). The discrepancy between these two suggests the extent to which the Facebook use of the term 'friend' has become synonymous with Facebook contacts, as opposed to its traditional definition. When users employ the cancellation feature it does not merely remove a



particular suggestion, but adds a new one in its place. This information is likely used to refine the suggestions made based on an algorithm used to make the suggestions, improving the relevancy of the suggestions. Even if this is not the case, this information is at least 'stored' or 'memorised' as an indicator of what connections are not present. Through the use of suggestions, users are alerted as to the possibilities which user-ship creates. It is important to note that it is not membership alone that creates these possibilities, but the activities involved in navigating and using the site. Users may well choose to join Facebook, but it is only through logging in and surveying these suggestions – and preferably interacting with this component – that suggestions may become more meaningful or relevant for that user.

### *Sponsored Component*

The sponsored component of Section C differs slightly from the previous two in that Facebook seemingly employs this section to advertise new additional features users may make use of. One such feature may be the recently<sup>4</sup> added Facebook Mobile add-on<sup>5</sup>. Although appearing under the 'sponsored' component, the 'Facebook for your mobile' is essentially an advertisement for the Facebook platform (Facebook, 2009a). Another similar advertisement appearing under this component is a 'Connect with More Friends' feature that contains a text field for users to insert a friend's e-mail address, to which they can send an e-mail invitation to start using the site. As with the 'suggestions' component, each 'advertisement' is accompanied by a small grey x, which users can click should they wish to remove the displayed feature. If they so choose, however, the feature will not simply be replaced, but a small interfaced window will appear asking them to provide feedback regarding their reason for doing so. In this space users are informed that the information is used to "provide more relevant advertisements" and they must select a reason for essentially disliking the advertisement (Facebook, 2009a). Should they cancel this process, that feature will remain on their home page. In this manner, users are compelled into providing feedback. This window takes the form of a brief e-survey and resembles a cost-benefit relationship. The user is required to take time (cost), regardless of how brief, to provide feedback in order to remove the advertisement they do not wish displayed (benefit). The purpose of this 'sponsored' component is not entirely clear and Facebook may choose, at a later stage, to use it as a platform to launch advertisements etc.

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<sup>4</sup> As appearing January 2nd, 2010

<sup>5</sup> Mobile add-on here refers to a custom version of the Facebook service design for use on mobile phones.

### *'Connect with Friends' Component*

The "Connect with Friends" component appears directly below the 'sponsored' component in Section C (Facebook, 2009a). This space seems to act as an overview of the various applications or tools created by Facebook that users may employ. Essentially, this space showcases the Facebook Friend Finder, Mobile Phone and e-mail Facebook invitation tools that users use either to have greater access to the site or to increase their number of Facebook Friends. The reiteration of showcasing these features indicates the extent to which Facebook wishes to emphasise or ensure that users are aware of these features and take steps to utilise them. When the component's title is selected (the text appearing in Facebook Blue) the user is taken again to the "Find your Friends/ People you may know" page. Again the link is duplicated and this suggests the importance of the addition of new contacts to the Facebook service and experience. The greater the number of Facebook Friends a user has, the greater the access that user has to various people and the richer his or her Facebook experience is likely to be. If we are to imagine Facebook as a stream of consciousness, where various Facebook Friends contribute to posts that act as moments or thoughts in this stream, then the more friends a user has, the more frequently that user is likely to receive updates and the more rapid that stream of consciousness will flow – consequentially increasing the richness of information that stream produces.

### **Application Bar**

As mentioned earlier, the Blue Navigation Bar is not the only vertical control bar on the site. Users will find, at the bottom of their browser page, a single grey bar that runs from one end of the page to the other. The grey control bar does not stretch the entire span of the site, like the Blue Navigation Bar, but maintains a centred position one centimetre equidistant from each side of the page, regardless of the browser page width. The grey control bar is segmented into 5 parts (Facebook, 2009a). The segment on the far left contains an 'abbreviated' version of the Facebook logo. As opposed to containing the full word, the 'icon' version of the logo contains only the f positioned in a small box coloured with Facebook Blue. This segment is titled 'Applications' and this title appears directly to the right of the icon. When users click on this segment a window will appear originating from the segment with a list of users' applications, including those which users have added to their bookmarked section. The list includes third-party applications, as well as those designed by Facebook. The list appears in a neutral grey box, but the title appears in a small horizontal rectangle

coloured in Facebook Blue with the text in white. To the right of the title is a white dash that acts as a 'minimise' button similar to that found in various versions of the Windows Operating System. In the next segment – to the right of the application segment – is an assortment of icons reflecting those applications the user has added to his or her 'bookmarked' list. This bookmarked list allows users to access applications that are regularly employed with greater ease by 'moving' these applications from their applications list to their bookmarked list. Once this process occurs, representative icons appear in the adjacent segment. When users 'hover' over these icons the corresponding names are revealed in a dark grey callout box. Clicking one of these icons will transport the user to that application. The next segment is the chat function. This segment contains a small icon that is made to resemble a person's outline coloured in a light grey. In addition to the outline, the icon is made up of a small dot that changes colour according to the person's online status. If, for example, they activate the chat function, the dot will change to green; if they choose to go 'offline' then the dot will return to grey. Directly next to the icon is corresponding text that relates to the status and purpose of the icon. One of these icons relates to Facebook's 'chat' application. The word 'chat' is displayed, followed by a user's chat 'status' (either on or offline) which appears in brackets. When users go 'online' with the chat application the bracketed 'offline' changes to the number of Facebook Friends that are online. Again, Facebook displays a desire to keep users informed as to the accessibility of Facebook Friends. The user's personal chat status is displayed when they are offline, but as soon as the user logs into the Facebook chat function, the status is changed to reflect information concerning Facebook Friends or the number of people that can be accessed with that application.

The last segment of the application bar is the notifications segment. This is the smallest sized segment, as it contains a single icon resembling a sign plaque. When hovered over, the segment will display the word 'Notifications' in a dark grey callout box (Facebook, 2009a). The number of notifications is displayed as part of the icon in a red box containing the number of new notifications in white numbers. This is reset each time the user reviews the notifications and the red block will disappear until a new notification is received. Notifications are adjustable according to what the user wishes to be notified of. Many third-party applications will notify users as to their and Facebook Friends' activities, but these can be removed and adjusted so that only those notifications users wish to be displayed are visible. All the Application and Chat segments have corresponding icons which, when clicked, present the user with a box originating from that segment displaying the new notifications. Notifications can also be viewed on a full page by selecting the 'see all' link similar to the 'requests' component in Section C. Notifications, like the 'suggestions' component, are separated

by a thin grey horizontal line and are accompanied by small icons that serve to categorise notifications, whether by application or function. Facebook Friends' names appear again in Facebook Blue and this informs users of the presence of a link and subsequent access node for that person. Notifications are provided for multiple activities on Facebook, including replicated information that might appear in the Live or News Feeds. These can include alerting users to their Facebook Friends' interaction which usually consists of posting on each other's walls and commenting on photographs or status updates. Again, this is customisable so that specific categories of notifications are made visible. In this regard Facebook users can be notified when one of their Friends writes on a mutual Friend's wall or comments on another Friend's status update. Unlike the News and Live Feeds, notifications are customisable according to types of notifications rather than to Facebook users. Notifications, like News Feeds, are followed by the time elapsed since the event took place and again this reflects a desire for content-congruency throughout the site (Facebook, 2009a).

The Application Bar, although similar in many ways to its counterpart, nonetheless performs an entirely different set of functions. Why the developers structured and designed it to appear as it does is unknown, but one cannot ignore its similarities to the 'task bar' that appears in recent versions of the Windows Operating System. Indeed, one could argue that it is a hybrid of the Windows task-bar and the Mac OS X Dock, both of which are used to contain applications and functions. Both the task-bar and the dock operate in a way that conveniently categorises and orders various functions available to users. The benefit of modelling the application bar on these two is evident in that the majority of users are likely to employ either Windows or similar operating systems on their computers. In fact, the assortment of bookmarked icons that appear in the second segment is almost identical in structure to the Windows task-bar which makes use of the same feature. In this way users would be all too familiar with the uses and navigational properties inherent in these structures. Again there is an indication that Facebook is modelled in such a way so as to replicate many instances that might appear in 'reality' and a concern with creating a native environment that users are already familiar with. The desire to recreate known instances is likely an effort to maintain users' interest. However, these known structures are at the same time paired with unknown ones that typify and distinguish the Facebook experience. When the segments of the task bars are 'clicked', all (but the assortment of icons) reveals a menu corresponding to that segment. Each of these, however, is governed by its title appearing in Facebook Blue which can be construed as an allusion to the Blue Navigation Bar, the overarching control panel. The use of Facebook Blue reminds users that what

appears below is still a part of the Facebook experience and falls within the domain of Facebook. Although the application bar does not move when users scroll down the page, it mirrors the dock and task-bar which would appear directly underneath it. These lines again, blur the distinction between what appears in the browser window (Facebook content) with what appears outside (the user's desktop and personal content). Content that typically appears on our own desktops, even in a library, is nonetheless part of a personal experience with that machine. Computer users are interfaced with the machine in use and what appears before them is the product of personal, active choices which are inputted in the form of commands. The displayed content then, is a reflection of those commands. Internet navigation, however, is more explorative and the activity of launching an Internet browser is done with some awareness that the user is 'leaving' his or her 'personal' computer and entering a space that is mutually negotiated and created. This space, however, is presented in the (aptly named) window, a box that borders that window and distinguishes it from the personal space of the screen. That personal space is protected in a way from the external through the presence of this border. By blurring this line, and replicating the task-bar or dock there is a communicated desire that the user experiences Facebook content as personal and not external. The collection of Friends and the tools of convenience all aid in the making the external more personal and *known*.

## Chapter 8

# ANALYSIS: THE FACEBOOK PRINCIPLES

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### Presence

What is of particular interest regarding the Facebook Principles is the location where users may find it. It is not an actively advertised or visible page and based on its description one may expect to locate it in a fairly central or easily accessible point. I stumbled upon the Facebook Principles purely by accident whilst reading the Facebook Terms (Facebook, 2009b). In one of the opening clauses, the Facebook Terms refer to "the principles" and it is at this point where the presence of these principles is made known (Facebook, 2009b). Users are able to select the link – which is made apparent by the underlined word 'principles' – and navigate towards the page.

Considering that, in many ways, the Facebook Principles encompass the superseding structure and paradigmatic stance of the developers of the site, its presence might be better suited to a centralised location or even acknowledged elsewhere on the site.

### Preamble

We are building Facebook to make the world more open and transparent, which we believe will create greater understanding and connection. Facebook promotes openness and transparency by giving individuals greater power to share and connect, and certain principles guide Facebook in pursuing these goals. Achieving these principles should be constrained only by limitations of law, technology, and evolving social norms. We therefore establish these Principles as the foundation of the rights and responsibilities of those within the Facebook Service.

The opening paragraph introduces the reader to the content that appears directly below. Although there is no indication of the structure or format these Principles will take, the author/s begin with the opening statement "we ...connection" (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). The importance of this opening

statement becomes apparent in that it is the first premise the author/s wish to communicate to users and a degree of emphasis is therefore created as a result of this occupied position. It is also clear that through the use of plural pronouns the Principles are not those of an individual, but of a collective body that remains anonymous to the reader. One assumes, however, that in this particular instance 'we' either refers to the developers, designers and gatekeepers of the site, or it could be used to refer to the collective set of users, so that the Principles become a set of core beliefs that everyone who uses the site should adhere to. The opening sentence may also allude to the ontological approach the developers subscribe to. The sentence opens with a statement providing an indication of intent. This is then backed-up with a substantive reason designed to validate the intent. The underlying motivation may be that in this case the agreement with the intent to "make the world more open and transparent" may not be universal, but the reason to "create greater understanding and connection" is a goal that the developers may assume is universally held (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). This assumption is evident throughout Facebook and elucidates the developers' worldview and ideological standpoint. Embedded within the first sentence is a casual inference which the developers are clear about.

The following sentence addresses the previous sentence and provides an additional justification for the 'promotion' of openness and transparency. The use of the word "promotes" suggests an active (as opposed to passive) approach to the realisation of these goals. The methodology through which this occurs is not directly indicated other than this is realised through "giving individuals greater power to share and connect" (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). This statement is of particular interest as it implies that Facebook as a domain or 'entity' possesses a form of power that can be relayed to its users. The transfer of this power is done so only with users and, although this is not explicitly stated, the acknowledgement of this 'power' speaks volumes to the presence of power relations on the site and the extent to which the developers and/or creators are complicit in the structuring of these relations. The principles describe how this 'power' transfer enables individuals to "share and connect" (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). Interestingly, there is no mention or specification of individuals possessing the right or ability to "share and connect" independent of Facebook (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). The principles state that Facebook facilitates the realisation of its goals through the transfer of power to individuals which then enables them to "share and connect". Despite the omission of their sovereign power to share and connect independently of the site, one cannot deduce that these principles seek to deny this ability. What it does perhaps suggest is a profound confidence and credence in the platform's power over these actions that are otherwise performed on a daily basis

independently of the site. The second clause describes the relationship between the bestowing of power and the overarching principles that guide Facebook in the pursuit of its goals. The principles here speak to an ideology, a set of beliefs and values, which direct the bestowment of power that indirectly helps Facebook to realise its goals, but at the same time directs 'Facebook' in pursuing these goals. It is here – the third reference to Facebook – where Facebook adopts a sense of agency. The first mention of Facebook refers to an object; something that is collectively constructed to realise certain goals. The second mention, "Facebook promotes", is murkier in that it is not clear if Facebook is being referred to as a subject or object since it could either be designed to promote, or it could itself do the promoting. The third mention, however, is closer to the adoption of subject than the previous two. Here, the principles describe themselves in essence and the way in which they guide Facebook in the "pursuit" of goals. Here Facebook adopts an action, it possesses the ability to move, and consequently becomes more than something that it is entirely constructed, but something that is able to plot a course in the hope of realising certain goals (Facebook, 2010).

The "achieving" of these principles is then elaborated on with the claim that only the "limitations of law, technology and evolving social norms" should impede the implementation of these principles. This is not to say that there are no other institutions or forces that may impede this process, but Facebook recognises these three as the only three that may legitimately impede this process. Facebook acknowledges the law's power to impede the realisation of its goals as it represents the institution that encompasses the rules and regulations as articulated by a collective group of people and their habitus. The law in this regard, supersedes Facebook's authority and power, even over its own domain. Technology is directly responsible for the creation of Facebook and it is progression in this domain that permits Facebook to maintain its existence and to further develop. Technology, in this regard, alludes to the development of knowledge that is then applied to contexts where Facebook may be directly or indirectly affected in either a positive or negative manner. The principles also prioritise the evolution of social norms. The reasons for this are not as clear as those for Technology or the Law, but again one might infer that Facebook depends on a normative socio-historical approach to modern forms of technology which promotes its use. In lieu of this, Facebook's utilisation is contingent on a degree of acceptance. Facebook's utilisation – and perhaps even the power it possesses – lies not merely in its structure and design, but is developed and added to by its increased utilisation. However, an increase in utilisation is not merely sufficient. Users have to engage with Facebook and utilise it regularly so that it may become integral to their social routine and normative method of social interaction (Facebook, 2010).



The final sentence provides a conclusion to the previous three statements. It speaks to the premises outlined in the previous three statements and the provision of a philosophical argument using premises and a conclusion to present a sound and persuasive assertion, suggests a Western paradigm. The conclusion also introduces the reader to the Principles which appear directly below. In their positioning as a "foundation to the rights and responsibilities", the Principles are constructed as the root and basic unit upon which all subsequent Facebook ideology and values are created (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). This is significant in that these Principles consequently occupy an important role in understanding the greater Facebook ideology and how that ideology shapes the choices and direction the platform takes. Furthermore, the reference to "rights and responsibilities" coupled with the opening "We" begins to resemble a constitution, particularly that of the United States which begins with "We the people" (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). This ratifies the prioritisation and emphasis of the Law as a body that possesses an authority which supersedes that of Facebook (U. S. Constitution.). This final section also refers to Facebook as a "service" for the first time and this reference may allude to the purpose of Facebook. Facebook as a 'tool' that can be utilised provides a service to its users: it enables them to "share and connect" where they previously were unable to do so. Clearly the principles thus encapsulate a belief in the value and benefit of increased transparency, openness, connection and sharing, as well as the way these three interact with each other (Facebook, 2010, para. 1).

## Principle 1

**Freedom to Share and Connect** People should have the freedom to share whatever information they want, in any medium and any format, and have the right to connect online with anyone – any person, organization or service – as long as they both consent to the connection.

The first principle differs from the preamble in that the word "power" is replaced with "freedom" (Facebook, 2010, para. 2). This is an interesting shift in terminology and suggests that Facebook sees increased power and freedom – in relation to "share and connect" – as interchangeable terms (Facebook, 2010, para. 1). This first principle identifies "People" as the body of reference despite Facebook's limited accessibility to the entirety collective group. The assertion here establishes information as the currency that Facebook employs and one cannot ignore the relationship that exists between information, knowledge and power. Information has become a powerful commodity in post-modern society and its flow is often tightly controlled and monitored. To assert that it should

be available to all can be interpreted as a refutation of the control of this commodity or the right to control it. The principle acknowledges the agency which "people" possess in the reference to "desire", "share" and "connect", but at this point little is known of the way in which this agency is facilitated or catered to on Facebook. In fact, no mention is provided of how Facebook is "establishing" this principle or providing this "right" it asserts people should possess (Facebook, 2010, para. 2). Furthermore, agency here is used not merely in reference to an individual, but is extended to "organisations" and "services" in that they are able to consent to a "connection". In the cases of these collective groups, it is unclear how this agency is exercised: whether it is one person who decides on behalf of the greater group what connections to accept or decline, or in fact if these decisions are made together. Similar to the use of "people", the principle suggests an extension of reach, an evolution that may have originated in the individual but now extends to organisations and services. "Organisation" and "service" may refer to commercial groups with financial goals, although this is not necessarily the case, especially in lieu of the presence NGOs, political parties and other organisations on Facebook. However, whether or not these organisations or services are commercial, they do have interests and objectives which, similar to Facebook, direct their actions and decisions.

In specifying all "medium" and "format", the principle builds on its mode and extends beyond it. There is a real sense here that Facebook sees information as a commodity that can manifest itself in a variety of mediums and, because of the varying forms this information can adopt, a platform that facilitates its "trade" or "sharing" must be able to accommodate these alternate forms (Facebook, 2010, para. 2). The principle refers to "connection", although the details of this connection are unclear. Establishing Facebook connectivity occurs through mutual consent, but "connection" can also refer to the ongoing interaction and connectivity that occurs thereafter during which mutual consent is not always required or established (Facebook, 2010, para. 2). However, each party reserves the right to terminate that connection (on the platform) at any point and the knowledge of this may result in an indirect form of regulation.

## Principle 2

**Ownership and Control of Information** People should own their information. They should have the freedom to share it with anyone they want and take it with them anywhere they want, including removing it from the Facebook Service. People should have the freedom to decide with whom they will share their information, and to set privacy controls to protect those choices. Those controls, however,

are not capable of limiting how those who have received information may use it, particularly outside the Facebook Service.

The second Principle begins with a definitive introductory sentence: "People should own their information." (Facebook, 2010, para. 3). Unlike the previous Principle that sought to describe its aim in detail, this Principle starts with a definitive claim that resembles an attempt to ensure that if the reader discerns anything from the principle, it is that people "should own their information." (Facebook, 2010, para. 3). Again, there is reference to a collective that remains undefined. Information too, remains undefined and could refer to any number of items. Interestingly, there is a sense in which the sentence is circular in that it asserts ownership of information that already belongs to "people". For Facebook to make such a claim suggests that perhaps the world in which we live does not necessarily permit ownership of one's own information or at least in the manner Facebook is seeking to promote. Questions arise here as to what defines ownership and how does one establish whether information is 'theirs'? In addition to this, the use of the plural, although likely used to maintain some form of consistency throughout the principles, does also indicate that possession may in fact never be permitted at an individual level but must rather be shared in a collective setting. Ownership is already undefined and if it is only to be possessed by a collective, then its meaning becomes further ambiguous.

The second sentence extends on the first as an addition of the opening assertion. Here again, the plural is used: "they" should possess the freedom – a possible reference to the first principle – to share this information with "anyone they want" (Facebook, 2010, para. 3). Although the term "anyone" generally does not require a definition or explanation, in the context of the Facebook Principles this term may occupy a dual meaning: it could be interpreted as the "anyone" typically used in everyday language that refers to any individual or person; however, there is a sense here that Facebook does not wish to distinguish a person from an organisation or service and in this regard "anyone" extends once again to include collectives. The second part of the sentence then refers to possessing freedom to take information with them anywhere they want. The ability to transport or move information assigns a quality to information that it typically does not possess – that of occupying space in reality. Information here is almost concretised and this is unsurprising in that digital information, although not always definitive in nature, does occupy space whether it be on a mobile phone, memory card, hard drive or corporate server; digital information is stored in a location and is transportable either through a device such as a memory stick or through the Internet. The reference to "take it" most

likely refers to Facebook's inherent reliance on the Internet as a nexus and matrix that permits and aids Facebook's very existence. Transportability in an age where Internet access increasingly pervades every aspect of social life ceases to become an obstacle to the movement and trade of a commodity such as information, and services that are structured on this matrix are able to benefit from this increased accessibility. The final clause of the sentence acknowledges a right to remove this information from the Facebook Service and again this is extended from the first sentence as ownership can be construed as an extension of agency. "Removing" here does not necessarily indicate the destruction of this information, but the movement off of or away from the service. This specification raises a question regarding the duality of information. Digital information can be simultaneously stored in multiple locations and can be duplicated to facilitate this. There is a sense that this final clause identifies that although people may possess information and move it on their own, their right to that information permits them to not only move it, but remove it (and perhaps even its duplicates) off the Facebook Service (Facebook, 2010, para. 3).

The following claim extrapolates on the freedom to control the movement of information and addresses the freedom to decide with whom to share that information. Sharing here seems to allude to the principle of 'action' on Facebook that appears in structural elements such as the 'Share' button on the Home page and Profile pages. The Principle can, as a result, be seen to specify the nature of information and although it is previously asserted that this information can take any form or medium, in essence it may only take those forms or mediums that the Facebook Service recognises and facilitates. The sentence, however, does not seem to address deciding not to 'Share'. The clause suggests that people using the Facebook Service do so in order to share their information or to establish connections that facilitate the mutual and equitable exchange of information. This could perhaps further indicate that 'People' who use the Facebook Service purely to access and 'glean' information from others are in a sense violating the constructed normative understanding of information exchange. The final clause directly refers to the platform's privacy settings and acknowledges these as "controls" that may be employed in the service of protecting the "choices" made regarding with whom to share "their" information (Facebook, 2010, para. 3). This is the first direct reference to a structural component of the Facebook Service which appears in the principles and consequently sequesters a degree of the reader's attention and experience with the site. The use of the term "protect" separates the ability to make choices from other actions as either a vulnerable action or – perhaps more likely in this case – as an action that may either be abused or disregarded (Facebook, 2010, para. 3).

The final sentence acts as a limitation clause by alerting the reader to a possible limitation of these controls or even on the reader's understanding of the purpose or capabilities of these controls. Here it is specified that the choice to share information is irreversible; although further exchanges may be prevented or connections terminated, those in possession of received information have the ability to use it as they so wish. This is problematic as this final assertion may pose problems in its implementation alongside the first principle. To possess, at the same time, the freedom to share information and the right to own one's own information may result in a scenario in which people share information they have no ownership of.

### Principle 3

**Free Flow of Information** People should have the freedom to access all of the information made available to them by others. People should also have practical tools that make it easy, quick, and efficient to share and access this information.

The third Principle follows on from the second in that it seeks to provide greater clarity regarding the movement of information. The title of the Principle uses the term "flow" that, unlike the previous two claims, contains strong imagery (Facebook, 2010, para. 4). Although references to "information flow" are not unique, in this instance the choice of words does still elicit imagery that the reader is able to identify with. "Flow" may bring to mind images such as rivers and streams, or even more contemporary images such as motorways and industrial routes (Facebook, 2010, para. 4). Regardless of the specific type of image that is brought to mind, in each of these mentioned cases, the optimum or desired ideal is similar. In the case of a motorway, the flow of traffic refers to a scene where vehicles are able to move at speeds without obstruction. Vehicles each have their own specific routes, destinations and desired travelling speeds which, when in flow, neither impede nor detract from other vehicles' courses or methods of travel. The result resembles an ordered system in harmony where each individual's choices work in conjunction with the overall effectiveness of the entire system, hence the word 'flow' (Facebook, 2010, para. 4). The Internet has often been compared to a motorway, as – it is often referred to as the 'Information Highway'. This comparison is due to their common requisites to establish a harmonious system – both traffic and information need to travel without excessive accidents. In this principle, the emphasis appears to lie more of the ability of others to have the necessary means and tools required to "access" the information. The opening sentence includes a specification that this "freedom" extends only to the information that is made available to

them by others. In this regard, people do not possess the right to access information that is hidden or private and this specification draws on the assertion made in the previous Principle (Facebook, 2010).

The second sentence provides an addition to the first in that it identifies the need for "practical tools" that enable the access to and sharing of information to be "easy, quick and efficient" (Facebook, 2010, para. 4). It is relatively obvious that "tools" refers to anything other than the platform in question, viz. Facebook, but the author/s of these Principles allude to Facebook's dependency on other key tools or resources in order to create an environment which permits the platform to operate its services (Facebook, 2010, para. 4). Facebook is contingent on technologies that individuals simultaneously employ when using Facebook's services. Facebook access is not available where there is not access to the Internet. Any connection to Facebook – short of a direct cable into Facebook's server – requires an Internet connection either through a computer, mobile phone or other device. As a result, this clause may be read as an acknowledgement of this dependency without explicitly doing so. The use of the terms "easy, quick and efficient" can be thought of as necessary conditions that facilitate the exchange of information (particularly poignant when thought of as a commodity). Information as a commodity requires the easy access and exchange of this information to prevent stasis (Facebook, 2010, para. 4). People who possess "practical tools" require little training. Enabled information-exchange benefits those people as well as the overarching system that depends on those instances of exchange to develop and sustain the system further. Assuming the system serves the interests of the people, this relationship is almost symbiotic in nature and both depend on each other to survive, or rather, to progress the exchange of information.

## Principle 4

**Fundamental Equality** Every Person – whether individual, advertiser, developer, organization, or other entity – should have representation and access to distribution and information within the Facebook Service, regardless of the Person's primary activity. There should be a single set of principles, rights, and responsibilities that should apply to all People using the Facebook Service.

In using the term "fundamental", this principle presents equality as an absolute (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). The emphasis applied here is evident in that it ensures a lucid presentation of the assertion viz. "Fundamental Equality" (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). The opening clause introduces a "Person" for the first time; whereas previously references were only made to "People" (Facebook, 2010, para. 1,5). However, this is not in aid of specifying the singular of 'People' as the following descriptions i.e.

individual, advertiser etc., include 'organisation' and reference to 'other entity'. This appears to be almost principally concerned with relaying to the reader Facebook's understanding of personhood and how it extends from normative conceptions of a 'person' to include organisations or other entities. It is unclear what exactly the author/s of the principles refer to by 'entity' or if in fact they are merely trying to establish an association between Person and entity in the mind of the reader that may in turn extend our notion of the self. The categories referred to may also provide an indication of what Facebook considers to be the types of 'Person' that use the service. "Individual" appears to be a direct reference to people as we generally conceive of them, and certainly the majority of Facebook user-ship consists of individuals (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). Advertisers – however serving of their own interests – generate revenue for Facebook and consequently would seem to occupy an important role in the matrix of Facebook users. Developers also differ to general individuals in that part of their role is the creation of new tools and software that can be implemented into the site to benefit Facebook, its users, or both.

After the specification of 'entities' that comprise Facebook's definition of "Person" the Principle continues by asserting that all these entities "should have representation and access to distribution and information within the Facebook Service" (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). The use of the term "representation" is interesting here in that it can be construed to indicate the role the Profile page (or Facebook Service more generally) plays in relation to individuals or "entities" (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). Whether these representations are accurate or bound to an individual's subjectivity or identity is unknown, but here there is at least an acknowledgement that to some extent this relationship is based on a representation of sorts. The reference to access again reminds the reader that this "access" is not guaranteed and perhaps even results in an acknowledgement that the service is dependent on other technological tools to maintain and sustain its existence. Accessibility here becomes an important facilitating property in that access in the Facebook Service is contingent on a variety of factors, but before even that, an entity must possess access to the service itself. Access here, however, is primarily concerned with "distribution and information" (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). It has already become apparent the way in which Facebook – and indeed many other technological tools and services – promulgate the commoditisation of information and the primary action involved in maintaining information as a commodity is distribution. Whereas previous Principles referred to the sharing and access of information, here 'distribution' is used. As a result the way information is actioned upon becomes clearer and a shift from a more specific, individual act of passing information from one Person to another, to an action where information is 'distributed' to many

persons within the service. The final clause of the first sentence appends an important final condition by clarifying that this 'right' should not be contingent on the person's "primary activity". Although "primary activity" is ambiguous in that activity could refer to a host of actions that a person could perform on the Facebook Service, the inclusion of "primary" may suggest that this in fact links to the first part of the sentence and the nature of the "Person" (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). In other words, the freedom to access and distribute information becomes a right that **all** persons are entitled to and the fundamental equality established in the previous sentence extends to include equality across activity regardless of who benefits from that activity.

The final sentence of the Principle establishes -- in essence -- the Principles themselves. Although the sentence also serves in asserting that this Principle is applicable to all "People", the opening clause establishes the need for a single set of "principles, rights and responsibilities" that encapsulates this fundamental equality for all (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). This reference is clearly circular as the requirement for a set of guiding principles is provided as a premise for an argument supporting these principles in the very set of Principles it seeks to reify. In addition, there seems to be a degree of discord between the "freedom" that has been referred to in each of the preceding Principles and then the necessity or need for a **single** set of guiding principles (Facebook, 2010, para. 5). Although **the** Principles are likely intended for benefit and protection of Facebook users, there is a sense that the act of delineating a set of principles speaks to a dimension of control and power that has previously been left unchartered.

## Principle 5

**Social Value** People should have the freedom to build trust and reputation through their identity and connections, and should not have their presence on the Facebook Service removed for reasons other than those described in Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibilities.

The fifth Principle introduces "social value" as an attribute that originates from trust and reputation (Facebook, 2010, para. 6). The first sentence begins in a similar format to preceding Principles with the appearance of "people should have the freedom to". This is followed by the assertion that this freedom should permit the building of trust and reputation through "identity and connections" (Facebook, 2010, para. 6). It becomes immediately apparent here that social value acts as a by product of the combined effects of identity and connections. "Trust" and reputation" are not



attributes or qualities that can develop in relation to a single individual but through interaction between two or more people (Facebook, 2010, para. 6). As a result, there is a real sense in which trust and reputation are indicators of the social dimension of Facebook and the manner in which this dimension is prioritised over the individual. However, although it is apparent that "connections" links directly to this social dimension, does this then refer to an identity that operates solely at a social level? There is a sense that the aspects of one's identity that are personal are in fact not seen to be utilised or drawn upon in the establishment of "trust" and "reputation" (Facebook, 2010, para. 6).

The second part of the sentence – as a direct follow on from the first – uses the term "presence" for the first time in relation to the threat of removal from the Facebook Service. It is here for the first time that the nature of Facebook utilisation is extended to that of a 'service'. "Presence" alludes to a state of being in a particular place or location. Although representation has been explored and mentioned previously in the Principles, "presence" builds on this, creating a scenario where Facebook users exist not only in reality but in a virtual setting too (Facebook, 2010, para. 6). The interaction and connectivity between these two embodiments, so to speak, is unclear, but there is a very clear indication here that Facebook sees the creation and adoption of Facebook pages not only as a means of creating a static representation of a person at any particular time, but as an extension of that person's presence in a domain that is generally unfixed but nonetheless bound in time. The final part of the Principle functions at two levels. First, the structure adopted functions to reassure the reader by asserting that their presence will not be removed for reasons other than those described in Facebook's Statement of Rights and Responsibility. This ensures the reader is aware of the conditions and actions that could result in the "removal of their presence" so that they are then aware that following this 'Statement of Rights and Responsibilities' will prevent this from occurring (Facebook, 2010, para. 6). However, inherent in this clause is an assumption that the reader is already familiar with the potential removal of their presence and Facebook's ability to do so. At face value this assumption maybe innocent, but the acknowledgement that 'presence' on the Facebook service is not guaranteed or finite, speaks to an asymmetrical relationship of power that exists between Facebook and its user-ship. Authority, control and the power to revoke "presence" on the service (which is associated with identity and connectivity in the previous clause) rests with an unidentified entity and although users are told that adherence to the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities will ensure this does not occur; they are introduced to the possibility that it could (Facebook, 2010, para. 6).

## Principle 6

**Open Platforms and Standards** People should have programmatic interfaces for sharing and accessing the information available to them. The specifications for these interfaces should be published and made available and accessible to everyone.

The sixth Principle differs from the preceding five Principles in that it speaks to specific features of the sharing and accessing information. "Open Platforms and Standards" are references to a body of language that is typically not utilised in everyday discourse (Facebook, 2010, para. 7). Consequently the Principle introduces the assertion that people should have "programmatic interfaces" for sharing and accessing available information (Facebook, 2010, para. 7). The term "programmatic interfaces" is a direct reference to Facebook and can be interpreted as a possible operationalisation of the Facebook platform (Facebook, 2010, para. 7). The mention of interfaces in the plural, however, suggests the presence of platforms or interfaces other than Facebook that ought to serve in the realisation of similar goals. This plural may also be a reference to anticipated interfaces that may either extend, or be added onto, the Facebook service.

"Programmatic interfaces" introduces, for the first time, the true nature of the Facebook Service (Facebook, 2010, para. 7). Whereas previous Principles have addressed more superseding concerns relating to ownership and the distribution of information, Principle 5 acknowledges the fundamental architecture and structure of the Facebook Service, even if indirectly. The Facebook Service that has been referred to in previous Principles now becomes a "programmatic interface" with a different positioning (Facebook, 2010, para. 7). "Programmatic" is a clear indication of the 'essence' of Facebook in that it is ultimately – once reduced to its core components – a set of functional attributes that work holistically to realise a final 'program' (Facebook, 2010, para. 7). An interface is typically construed as the point at which two systems – or subjects – meet and interact. As a result, a "programmatic interface" cannot function without two entities and the use of this term consequently acknowledges the Facebook user as an integral part of this interface.

The second sentence asserts that the specifications of these interfaces should be "published and made available and accessible to everyone" (Facebook, 2010, para. 7). In employing the term "specifications" the author/s are most likely referring to the **programmatic** specifications viz. the set of instructions or codes that constitute the programme. It is interesting that these specifications would be made publicly available as they, essentially, constitute the very fabric of the Facebook domain. That is not to say that to make it publicly available would result in making the Facebook Service vulnerable, but it does suggest that the source of the domain's existence, however dependant on the realisation of these

programmatic specifications, is not wholly dependent on them to maintain its existence lest Facebook make itself vulnerable and threaten the privacy and security of its users.

## Principle 7

**Fundamental Service** People should be able to use Facebook for free to establish a presence, connect with others, and share information with them. Every Person should be able to use the Facebook Service regardless of his or her level of participation or contribution.

Similar to Principle 4, Principle 7 uses the term "fundamental" to emphasise the absolute nature of the Principle's tenets (Facebook, 2010, para. 8). The first sentence begins with the assertion that the establishment of "a presence" through the use of Facebook should be "free". Interestingly, Facebook does not specify that this presence is on the Facebook site or service, but rather chooses to refer to a "presence" that is not rooted in any particular location, domain or mode (Facebook, 2010, para. 8). When considering recently made developments this is unsurprising since Facebook has now extended its services to include a service that permits existing Facebook users to use their credentials to access other websites and social services as opposed to creating a new 'identity' in each domain. This, in essence, means that one's Facebook "presence" can now be extended to other sites and used in exchanges with other platforms and services. If this is the case, then the extension of this "presence", created and housed through Facebook, may then imply that the Principles themselves are extended to these other services and platforms, as opposed to the user adopting a separate set when creating an 'identity' on these other sites.

The remainder of the sentence identifies an additional two activities that Facebook may be utilised for viz. "to connect with others and to share information with them" (Facebook, 2010, para. 8). Both of these have been referred to in previous Principles and here seemingly serve to reiterate their importance to the Facebook domain. In addition, the author/s may wish to ensure that the reader creates an association between these two and begins to see them as activities bound together in their performance or enactment of the Facebook Service.

The second sentence establishes that every "Person" should be able to use the Facebook Service and further adds that this freedom should not be contingent on their level of contribution or participation. Although this assertion has obvious relevance to the service in question, there is an element in which the author/s may be using this assertion as an opportunity to establish the requirements of Facebook use which Facebook does not immediately control. The most likely – and perhaps relevant – example here would be the availability of Internet connectivity, whether it be

through a wireless network or through a fixed cable line. In order to use the Facebook Service, one would first require a device that would enable connection to the Service as well as connectivity to the Internet. As mentioned previously, this clearly acknowledges the dependency of the Facebook Service on the existence and maintenance of other services or products that ultimately realise the Facebook Service. Without Internet connectivity and devices to store and interpret transferred information, Facebook as a service or space that exists in real time would cease to exist. By asserting that people should be able to use the Facebook Service, the Principle moves access to the Internet and access to technologic devices capable of Internet connectivity closer to the status of necessities. The additional specification that this use should be unrelated to level of use or participation may serve to indicate to the reader that the level of entitlement to service is unrelated to their level of investment in the Facebook Service or platform itself. Although, again, this serves as a reassurance, at the same time it also introduces the reader to the possibility that fundamental service could in fact be contingent on their participation and user-ship. I am not suggesting here that this is the author/s motive, but rather that this specification indicates that this acknowledgment played a role in the formulation of these Principles at some point in time and speaks to the paradigmatic elements that were drawn upon during the conceptualisation process (Facebook, 2010).

## Principle 8

**Common Welfare** The rights and responsibilities of Facebook and the People that use it should be described in a Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, which should not be inconsistent with these Principles.

Principle 8 is similar to Principle 5 in that it refers to the "Statement of Rights and Responsibilities" (Facebook, 2010, para. 9). Although the title of the Principle is "Common Welfare" the Principle acts as a dictum regarding the rights and responsibilities of Facebook and the People who use it. It is not clear here how "Welfare" in its general social reference ties in with rights and responsibilities, other than to suggest that these rights and responsibilities bring about "common welfare", although this is not explicitly stated here (Facebook, 2010, para. 9). The first part of the sentence primarily seeks to establish the role of the "Statement of Rights and Responsibilities" as the author/s understand it, although there is no mention of how it was formulated or whether Facebook users were consulted during the formulation of these "rights and responsibilities" (Facebook, 2010,

para. 9). This first section also seeks to provide this Statement with a degree of authority by establishing its existence in the Principles themselves as well as defining its purpose.

The final part of the Principle asserts that this Statement must not be inconsistent with the Principles. Although the Principle is primarily directed at the Statement and its role for Facebook and the People who use it, this final specification also serves to establish the importance and priority of the Facebook Principles themselves. The claim that the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities, however important to the establishment of common welfare, must not be inconsistent with the Principles, suggests that in relation to the Principles, the Statement of Rights and Responsibilities occupies a position of lower importance in the mind/s of the Principles' author/s.

## Principle 9

**Transparent Process** Facebook should publicly make available information about its purpose, plans, policies, and operations. Facebook should have a town hall process of notice and comment and a system of voting to encourage input and discourse on amendments to these Principles or to the Rights and Responsibilities.

In referring to a "transparent process", the ninth Principle addresses a theme that has, up to this point, been unaddressed in the Principles themselves (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). The preamble introduced the reader – as well as the Principles – to the purpose of the Facebook platform viz. to create a more free and transparent world. It is here that transparency is yet again mentioned, but this time in relation to a process. The first sentence establishes that Facebook has a responsibility to publicly avail the user/reader of information regarding "its purpose, plans, policies and operations" (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). It does not specify however, the extent to which this information must be publicly made available or even how "publicly" is defined. The references to "purpose, plans, policies and operations" suggest that all facets of the process should be transparent (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). However, these encompass only the overarching structural aspects of the platform or domain and do not include the everyday processes or systemic features that comprise the maintenance and existence of the site. "Purpose, plans, procedures and operations" highlight the nature of Facebook as a service, but do not include the architectural features of the platform that ultimately constitute its existence as a platform and service that its users employ (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). Principle 5 rather, as mentioned earlier, covers these intrinsic features in the establishment of "Open Platforms and Standards" (Facebook, 2010, para. 6). The second sentence of the Principle describes the format in which this information should be publicly disseminated. The author/s describe a "town-hall process" of "notice and comment" and a "system of voting" which indicate a desire to foster a sense of community amongst users

(Facebook, 2010, para. 10). The town hall acts as a central point or location where town residents will gather to discuss topics and engage with each other. As well as a central gathering point, the town hall also represents a place in which decisions are made and this ties in well with the "system of voting" described in this Principle (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). The use of this town-hall analogy is interesting as it is the first time in the Principles that a metaphoric description has been employed. This may be an attempt on behalf of the author/s to ensure the reader identifies and connects with this aspect of the Principle. Developing a sense of community requires a level of investment from individuals in the establishment and maintenance of the community. Residents of a town acknowledge the importance of investing a portion of their time and energy in participating in collective activities that promote the progress of the town. This implies that a town resident will integrate the town into his or her identity and see him or herself as a resident of that particular town., Through the use of this analogy, the author/s may be attempting to foster a similar degree of integration into the user's identity so that there is a level of identification and ownership originating from the user in relation to the Facebook Service.

It is unclear how this "system of voting" that Facebook describes exists and operates on the platform itself (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). There is no explicit indication as to how this "system of voting" is translated from a metaphorical application to the Facebook Service itself, although the reference to "notice and comment" may also refer to posting a notice by way of Facebook share' and then using users' comments or 'likes' as a form of tally or vote (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). If this were the case it is unclear as to whether or not this would adequately represent the one-man-one-vote system that is typically employed in these cases. Furthermore, it is not clear as to whether or not this system is already in place as "Facebook should have..." indicates that such a system is envisaged for the service but is currently unavailable or under construction. The purpose of this town-hall process is to "encourage input and discourse on amendments to these Principles or to the Rights and Responsibilities" (Facebook, 2010, para. 10). This differs somewhat from the metaphor employed as the types of decisions that typically are made in town halls are not usually those that apply to the legislature or laws of the town. However, specific reference is made of the town-hall process being particularly concerned with the development and refinement of the Principles and Rights and Responsibilities through input and discourse by the People. This is very important as it reveals to the reader that the Principles and Rights and Responsibilities are not static but are evolving in a manner that is ultimately dictated by the author/s and the People whose discourse and input are drawn upon. This is not self-evident in that the Principles are presented in a format that suggests a fixed nature, especially if they are to be adopted by the People who utilise the Facebook service. To suggest rather that they are 'amendable', poses a challenge in lieu of the 'fundamental' and absoluteness with which the Principles presents many of its claims.

## Principle 10

**One World** The Facebook Service should transcend geographic and national boundaries and be available to everyone in the world.

The tenth and final Principle is perhaps the most significant and poignant of all. The title "One World" is a clear ideological reference that establishes a 'one-world' view (Facebook, 2010, para. 11). The Principle refers to the transcendence of "geographic and national boundaries" and to universal availability. This is significant as the service was founded – and is still based – in the United States of America and the Principle introduces, for the first time, the existence of national borders and states. The specification of "One World" may also be read as a claim that all Facebook users are regarded as equals and that nationality is of no interest or relevancy to the establishment or sustainability of these Principles (Facebook, 2010, para. 11). However, there is a sense that, as egalitarian as this claim may be, it is not wholly true or possible. The Facebook Service operates within a nation and is bound by laws and regulations that transcend these Principles. There is no reference to these overarching laws and regulations in the Principles and although the author/s may have thought this to be unnecessary, the belief in a "one world" bears with it a refutation of the nationalistic and geographic borders in which Facebook is inherently located and must adhere to (Facebook, 2010, para. 11).

In a similar fashion to the preceding Principles, while there is a clear communicated desire to make Facebook accessible to all, there is no acknowledgement that this requires additional resources and technological devices. This may speak to a possible end-goal; a desire for the service to transcend these obstacles and dependencies on other tools, so that it may adopt an existence independent of constraints and permit its users direct access without the requirement of a facilitating tool or resource.

## Chapter 9

# DISCUSSION

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### Colour

Kress & van Leeuwen (2001; 2006), in their various discussions on multimodal discourse, identify colour as an important mode that can be used in the articulation of discourse. In the Facebook Service, colour is used as a design element in various situations that can be said to constitute discursive practices.

The first, most prominent of these is the way in which colour is used as an identifying mode. The Facebook logo can be interpreted as a sign for the site, service and experience and as such is constructed and maintained as a key identifying representation of 'Facebook'. Apart from the text that constitutes the letters and word 'Facebook', the logo is essentially composed of two colours: white and 'Facebook' Blue. Facebook Blue is essentially a composite of three levels of RGB viz. R59, G89 and B152. Although these numbers have no real significance with regards to the constitution of identity on their own, the RGB colour spectrum is the primary means through which colour in electrical devices emerges (Falk, Brill & Stork, 1986). Since Facebook is produced and distributed in this manner, RGB represents the foundational system that ultimately aids in the construction and realisation of a colour – Facebook Blue – that is in turn used to represent and encapsulate the identity of the Service. Because Facebook is meant to be realised in a specific way, through the use of a digital device, the colour spectrum employed is significant with regards to questions surrounding materiality, and that in itself contributes to the subsequent interpretation of meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006).

What then does the use of the RGB colour spectrum signify in relation to Facebook and its identifying aspects? RGB as a colour spectrum is concerned with the deconstruction of light, although all colour is constituted through light, RGB – as opposed to CMYK which is used in printed media – has no real physicality or substance. RGB cannot be represented as a pigment or found in a 'material' object. Rather it is wholly dependent on light and our ability to perceive light in



a specific manner. Facebook Blue is constituted through a combination of RGB which on its own is meaningless sensory information that our brain must interpret and perceive as a colour. Apart from the processes of sensation and perception, what is of primary interest is the organisation of this percept into an understanding of the essence of the Facebook Service. Facebook Blue – and colour in turn – is not then symbolic of Facebook but constitutes it and makes it real in the eyes of the user or viewer. Given the importance of colour in constituting Facebook, it is unsurprising then that throughout the course of Facebook's history and the changes that have been made to the Service, both in terms of functionality and structure, the colour 'R59 G89 B152' has remained constant. Apart from the practical features of maintaining an awareness and consistency for the users of the service, the finite and ever constant nature of this colour serves to maintain the awareness and presence of the Facebook identity in the minds of its users. Facebook has paired itself with a colour that, although people might term generic, is unique in its subtlety. This is not to say that if users were presented with five colours, four of which were slight variations of Facebook Blue, they would be able to distinguish the colour from others; the colour on its own has no specific meaning. However, when paired with the white lettering of the Facebook logo or when used on the site, users recall the previous associations made between the site, the name and the colour. As a result of its use, colour is not a sign but rather a signifier (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Although on its own it has little meaning, it still has a meaning potential because of a history of being paired with the Service and employed in the use of creating an identity and brand in the minds of users and non-users alike.

Apart from the use of a specific colour in the Facebook logo, colour is carefully balanced and controlled throughout the site. All manifestations and realisations of aspects or features of the Facebook Service appear in either a specific colour or range of predetermined colours, whether it is Facebook Blue or 'white'. That is not to say that the entire contents of the site appear in a few specific colours, but rather that the elements or features of the site that constitute the structural or identifying features of the site are realised in a specific range and selection of colours. The analysis identified that the News Feed 'button', for example, is realised in an alternate 'blue' when the News Feed is selected or in view. The use of this alternative colour works in the performance of a certain function. The News Feed button is highlighted because it is currently in view and as a result is differentiated from the other buttons because of it. Colour here is used to differentiate one page from another. At a deeper level, however, this differentiation still impacts the function of colour as an identifying mode. When the page is in view, the identifying button is re-coloured in a lighter shade of Facebook Blue, serving to differentiate this button from others. However, one cannot overlook the association that

occurs at a deeper level of understanding. The page exists independently of viewership, but when in view it is in a sense 'activated' because it is visible to the viewer and he or she is able to perceive the information made available through the site. In this regard, the re-coloured button associates this ability or activation with the Facebook domain, reasserting the ability or service the site provides to its users. Colour here functions at an ideological level that, although not immediately apparent, is nonetheless a contributing factor in the articulation of discourse.

Apart from the visual performance of colour as a mode, its functional and communicative properties are perhaps the most pertinent. One of the most prominent buttons on the site is the 'share' button that appears directly underneath the white interactive box on the Home and Profile pages. Visually the button is far more striking than the other functional elements of the site. In terms of size, it is only slightly smaller than the logo itself and, when considering its function, this feature is not surprising. Apart from its size, the 'share' button is also coloured in Facebook Blue and its text is bolded, which emphasises its appearance. As discussed in the Principles analysis, Facebook identifies the sharing of information and connecting of users as the primary objectives in realising its goals of a more "open and transparent" world. The 'share' button is the principal point at which the action of sharing is performed and consequently its use is critical to the realisation of Facebook's objectives. The distinct colouring of the 'share' button in Facebook Blue again establishes this association, linking the button with the site's identity and purpose. The 'share' button then becomes a point of immense importance and power in that the user is able to 'share' information with a host of other users – even with the entire site, should they so wish – and at the same time this action, as a social practice, is constructed and prioritised in the architecture and principles of the site which realises Facebook's goal. Despite the user's evident role in the realisation of this goal, the colouring of the Facebook button can also indicate a quality that extends beyond association to include ownership. By using the same Facebook Blue, the service creates an extension of not only its purpose, but its identity as well, which is inherently present in the 'share' button. The action the user thus performs is facilitated by the button and it is that button that is ultimately employed in the dissemination of the user's information. Although the user performs the 'click', so to speak, the subsequent actions that ultimately disseminate the information are bound to that button and its colour results in a direct and acute connection with the Facebook logo and the service itself. The button then constitutes the service, so to speak, and rather than be seen as an extension of Facebook the 'share' button is a manifestation of the identity of the service and its purpose: a sign that embodies the function, purpose and core identity of Facebook.

This manifestation through colour is applicable not only to buttons or shapes, but appears in the text displayed on the site. Apart from the links that act as navigation points to other pages or sections of the service, names of users on the Home page are also coloured in Facebook Blue. The colouring of these names serves to differentiate this text from other text in terms of navigational properties. However, the use of Facebook Blue, as opposed to another shade of blue or a different colour all together, once again creates a direct link to the Facebook logo, the brand, and ultimately the service Facebook provides. These names constitute links to the profiles of these user's, where the Profile page is a representation of these users. This access is possible through the selection of this link, but also, more importantly, through the use of the service itself. Colour, again, realises the social practice that serves in the sharing of information, the connecting of 'people' through the access of Profile pages, and the establishment of connections through the construction and maintenance of a network of 'friends'.

## Structure

Similar to colour, structure can be seen to constitute a mode of discourse and is realised principally through design in the Facebook service. Although the term structure has a range of meanings, one of the most valuable and principal foci of the analysis was the architectural features of the site. Modern websites make extensive use of design principles in their composition and layout. Whereas websites a decade ago may have principally been concerned with the navigational features of the site, today this focus – although not absent – has diminished. When discussing structural features of a site, it is imperative to note that paradoxically, although design is considered a mode distinct from text or discourse in that it acts as a means of constituting social practice, structure in Internet sites is constituted in a form of language. Unlike the structural features that appear in reality (and here I am referring to non-digitised formats) all visual elements of websites can be reduced to a composite language that serves in the articulation and realisation of text as visual elements.<sup>6</sup> I use the term language broadly here as, although 'languages' such as HTML or XHTML are not spoken or living, they are nonetheless composed of a vocabulary and system of organisation that ultimately serves in the realisation of websites as we experience them. Users experience these features, however, not as text but as structural features and they are recognised and used as such. Apart from the aesthetic

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<sup>6</sup> A more thorough discussion of the significance and impact of this will be presented further on, but it is prudent to acknowledge this fact when identifying the various structural elements of the site and their use.

appeal structure can hold, it contributes to the overall experience and use of the site as well. The analysis began with the assumption that structure was significant to Facebook based on the structural changes the site has undergone over the course of its existence. Apart from the addition of new services, applications and functionality, visually Facebook has changed dramatically since its inception in 2004. These structural changes constitute an evolutionary process that has significant implications for understanding the way the site is employed and ultimately constituted. Similar to an evolutionary process, these changes do not occur at random and although that is not to say that structural changes constitute a form of natural selection, the changes do occur in response to stimuli, whether it is feedback obtained from users of the service or deductions made on the part of the developers and designers of the site. Nonetheless, there is significance in the structural elements of the site because they are performed with a purpose and often in response to some form of stimuli and although these are not self-evident, they do manifest in relation to other features.

One of the most noticeable structural features is visible in the composition of each page. As mentioned in the analysis, the Blue Navigation Bar is constant throughout the site and although it 'disappears' when a user scrolls down a page, the bar is present and visible as default when each page loads. Apart from its navigational properties, the bar serves to structure the site: to present all the content that appears directly below it in a form that makes its access and navigation easier for the user. The use of such a term is perhaps problematic as it has no real identifying features or qualities that can be named or assumed to be universal. However, as mentioned in the analysis, structure plays a vital role in establishing and maintaining order on the site. When navigating the site, users do not reflect on the positioning of a text box or vertical line, or acknowledge the Blue Navigation Bar as a structural feature of the site that subsequently facilitates the use of the site. Rather, the ease with which the navigation and structural composition of Facebook is experienced constitutes a 'feeling' rather than a rational, deliberated process. These 'feelings' or 'emotions' are natural responses to stimuli and consequently may be mapped or even understood and interpreted. That is not to say that feelings are experienced universally, but the attempt to structure and restructure a site communicates an assumption that the differences in the way in which these structural features may be interpreted or employed does not prevent the adoption and implementation of a universal architectural strategy. This assumption is reflected in the Principles with the acknowledgment that Facebook does not identify national or geographic boundaries as an obstacle to the use of the service. Whether this means that it does not recognise cultural differences is unclear but asserting that the service should be available to **all** constitutes an assertion that it can be used by all to begin with and

that this usability is in fact universal and transcendent of those differentiating features that are associated with national or geographic boundaries.

As was discussed above, structure is used in a plethora of ways, many of which are indicative of certain ideological intimations. Apart from the overarching role structure plays in the establishment and maintenance of Facebook, there are specific instances where this role can be understood in greater detail. Although the Facebook site has undergone considerable structural changes, one of the most pronounced changes produced is visible in the creation of the various 'sections' or 'compartments' on the site. The analysis was divided into three sections based on these structural domains in order to facilitate the presentation of the analysis, but also because this is how the site is visible to users. In essence, structure here is used, not only to compartmentalise various visual elements of the site, but as a means of organising the contents of the page into sections that in themselves communicate meaning (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001). The Home page, as the central location of the site, has a multitude of links and functions that the user can actuate. Facebook's sixth Principle refers to an "interface" that facilitates the sharing and access of information (Facebook, 2010). Facebook, as this "interface", has the potential to perform these actions but is dependent on the user to actuate the relevant features of the site. In this regard the elements are organised so that they may be used in a particular way.

To return to the Blue Navigation Bar, it is unsurprising to find that the four links—located directly adjacent to the logo – all function in a way that might aid the realisation of Facebook's stated primary goal: the sharing of information and increased connectivity. 'Home' redirects the user to the Home page where the feed of information is accessible; 'Profile' directs the user to the Profile page where users are able to share personal information with others; 'Friends' directs them to a list of their connections on the site; and 'Inbox' directs them to the Facebook messaging service. All four of these features, housed in the Facebook Blue Navigation Bar, function in a way that can be likened to the stated principle and objective of the service. The immediate and direct links to these different facets of the Facebook service are structured in such a manner that then binds them to the service itself (by appearing in the Navigation Bar that recalls the identifying aspects of the service) as well as communicating to the user their importance and role in realising the Facebook experience.

Structure then, as a mode, is vital to the binding of the overarching aims and Principles espoused in the ideology and manifesto of the site with the visual elements. Facebook is primarily visually constituted and as such it becomes imperative that the visual elements are organised in a manner

that best communicates and facilitates the use of the service to its users. Not doing so would result in the development of a schism between the stated Principles (intent) and the subsequent use of the service as realised through these visual elements. This schism would hinder, and perhaps even prevent, the maintenance of the system that all these aspects seek to balance.

## Navigation

Navigational points – or links – are realised in various ways on the Facebook service by the use of text, icons or other visual stimuli which are embedded with a hyperlink that ‘transports’ the user to another page of the site. It is important here to note that referring to Facebook as a site does not mean that Facebook is constituted in one particular location or by one particular ‘page’. The term site, – certainly in this context – refers to a composite of various features and elements that ultimately encompass the Facebook service. Because of this, the navigational points on each page play a pivotal role in the experience and overall cohesiveness of the site.

The first link, which is of particular interest to a discussion of the navigational elements of the Facebook site, is the Facebook logo itself. Apart from the position of this logo; firstly, in the Blue Navigation Bar and secondly, in the first link from the left, the Facebook logo is also an embedded link that redirects the user to the Home page. Apart from the practical benefits of this link, the Facebook logo has a dual purpose as described in the analysis, in that it embodies the identity of the Facebook service as well as incorporating the Home link that is typical of websites. What this then does is create an association between the idea, or representation, of the Facebook service and **the** principal page that is constructed as the central page of the site. The adage, “home is where the heart is”, although a cliché, encapsulates this point precisely. The ‘Home page’ is the term most frequently used to refer to a website’s central location or page. In many cases the Home page, as the heart of the site, is typically comprised of links or navigational points accessing the majority (if not all) of the pages available as part of that site. Facebook differs slightly from this model in that the links to the principal pages of the site are constant throughout the site – they can always be found in the Blue Navigation Bar. Consequently these pages have a permanent presence, even when they are not in view, as these links can be seen as a representation or representing sign of these pages. Navigation in this sense serves in the establishment of a system of hierarchy based on the prevalence of connections to each page available on the site. Due to the constant presence of the Blue Navigation Bar it becomes apparent that the pages which the embedded links direct to are of more importance and are

therefore elevated in the hierarchy. Despite their importance, however, the Home page is still the most important page as the Navigation Bar contains two links to this page: one accessible through the 'Home' link that appears in text, and one accessible through the Facebook logo.

One may ask why it was necessary to duplicate the Blue Navigation Bar on every page of the site. Would it not have been equally effective to create one bar on the Home page and a link back to the home page and then to the other principal pages? The posing of this question identifies an additional element regarding the points of navigation that have been previously unaddressed. As mentioned earlier, websites are not individual pages but a composite of pages that operate in tangent with one another to perform specific functions. Previously, websites might have been designed in a more segmented fashion: one page with links to other pages each of which provided specific information or performed a specific function. Although websites are still largely constructed in this manner, seeing the site along these parameters may prevent the emergence of a holistic conceptualisation of the site. The Facebook principles bear a reflexive reference to Facebook as a *single* service and not a collection of services. The Facebook experience cannot be reduced to a single function or action, but the collection of permissible actions and applications can be seen to constitute the singular goal and purpose viz. to facilitate the sharing of information and to connect people around the world. The Blue Navigation Bar encapsulates this attempt at unifying a plethora of separate actions into the realisation of a single objective in that it contains the links to the principal pages that constitute the site and houses these links in a single, ever-present structure which employs various modes such as colour and design to articulate a singular purpose.

The importance of navigation to the Facebook service thus becomes evident, as does its importance to websites in general. Links to other pages on the site are realised in a way that communicates their function to the user. Often, this function is confirmed by the transformation of the cursor to a pointing finger that indicates the presence of a 'link' to another page. This occurs, for example, when hovering over the Facebook logo and, in addition to the transformation of the cursor, a small yellow box appears displaying the word 'Home' which acts as a signifier for the link. These links communicate a point of access to the user and since these links often appear in either Facebook Blue or are surrounded by, or contain, some identifying element of the Facebook service, they depict an attempt to establish them as the means through which this access is provided. There is a tension in the way Facebook is conceived – and indeed perceived – and the inherent structure that constitutes it. Facebook is often identified and thought of as a 'site'; a singular entity that, although not cognisant

or intelligent, is nonetheless perceived as 'singular' in nature. This may in part be a result of how websites are typically thought of or conceptualised, as well as a consequence of Facebook itself. In representing the site in a singular symbol – its brand or logo – Facebook does communicate to users the underlying message that it can be constituted in one form. This is clearly not the case as the Facebook site is essentially a matrix of pages that are carefully linked and connected to each other. This structure resembles the one that Facebook seeks to create in its "one world" assertion of equal, connected 'people'. The navigational properties of the site are therefore the constituting elements that ultimately give way to this superseding structure and the service itself. All levels or units of the Internet, from the www to the local 'intranet', are all constituted through connections between various pages and sites. Consequently, the absence of these navigation points, or 'portals', to other pages would render Facebook – as well as any website – defunct.

## **Positioning**

Another element that relates strongly to structure and navigation is the positioning of various elements throughout the Facebook site. Apart from the strong relationship that exists between positioning and visibility that will be explored further on in the discussion, positioning also seems to be used as a system of categorisation and – like navigation – as a means to delineate a hierarchical structure between visual elements of the site.

Although there exist several ways to view the Facebook site, such as by mobile phone or handheld mobile device, one can argue that the Facebook site was primarily designed to be viewed on a computer screen. The computer screen or medium – to use Kress & van Leeuwen's (2001) terminology – displays the Facebook site through an Internet browser that is responsible for accessing the site to begin with. Because the Facebook site is dependent on the browser to present the site, the designers of the site would have had to position and build the structural elements of Facebook in relation to the 'canvas' provided by the browser. Whether the browser fills the whole screen or is displayed as a 'window' it is always rectangular in nature and this functions as the space the designers must work with in order to realise the Facebook service. The Blue Navigation Bar – regardless of the size of the window – always spans the entire window, as described in the analysis. The contents of the Bar, too, regardless of the size of the window, maintain a specific size and are constantly centred in the window. Since the analysis and write-up was completed, Facebook has again changed certain structural elements, but nevertheless the Bar continues to span the entire



window and the contents sizing remains unaffected. The position of the Blue Navigation Bar, although constant in the browser window, is also, to a degree, positioned relative to the user. The user has control over the window itself, is able to move it from one end of the screen to another and the exact position of the Blue Navigation Bar is always relative to the position of the browser window itself. In spite of this relative positioning, the Bar maintains its presence over all the content that appears below it. Even when the user scrolls further down the page to read the News Feed, for example, the Bar maintains its presence relative to the content that appears below it.

Positioning then embodies an ideological element in that its application and use are not wholly in the service of aesthetic appeal or functional improvements, but communicates meaning that extends beyond physicality to include elements concerned with ownership, control and power. The previous section on colour and structure noted how these modes are employed to associate visual elements of the site, such as the Blue Navigation Bar, with the core identity of the Facebook service. Positioning too can be seen to operate in a manner that defines and contributes to the user's understanding of the Facebook identity. Normative discourse – beyond the principles of design – acknowledges the 'top' as a position of authority; as podium stands, references to being 'further up the ladder' and the elevation of monarch's throne on its dais, all similarly allude to the importance of elevated positioning in relation to others. It is unsurprising then that this normative social practice would pervade the principles of design. Even if the designers do not wholly subscribe to them, these nonetheless manifest in the overall composition of the site.

Whether intended or not, Facebook identifies itself as a service that facilitates the sharing of information and the connection between its users. Despite the users required agency in the realisation of this service, it is Facebook that **provides** the service to its users. The Blue Navigation Bar can be interpreted as a reminder to users that all that appears below the Bar viz. contents, information posted by 'Friends', and additional features, is bequeathed unto users by the Facebook service and in its absence the provision of that information in that particular format would not be available.

Positioning plays an important role in communicating the relationship between structural elements of a page, such as the relationship between a post and its comments. The analysis described a user's ability to post comments on another user's updates or posts. Positioning here is used to identify the relationship between two structural elements in that the comments appear below the original post and are slightly indented. Regardless of the contents of the comment and its relationship to that post,

the structural positioning of the comment serves to communicate the presence of a relationship between the two elements. This relationship, however, may be extended to highlight the positioning of subjectivities viz. the user that posted the original update and the users that commented on that post. The provision of a comment to another user's post is positioned differently to that original post in a manner that speaks to the relevancy of that comment. All comments are thus positioned in relation to the original post. Comments appear with the user's name and photo, which serves to identify the origin of that comment. However, users are simultaneously figuratively positioned in relation to the original user. The original post, occupying the principal role, controls the subsequent posts and its originator is able to remove the original post and all the comments that appear below it. Facebook asserts that users have the right to share their information with others and positioning is used to denote the structural points at which this information can be shared. Adding a comment on another user's post, positions that comment within the original post and consequently that user relinquishes a part of the control and possession over that comment. It becomes a part of the original post and the user who posted the original comment is thus able to remove it should they so wish. Positioning of structural elements on the Facebook site mirrors the positioning of subjects to a large extent, and this in turn speaks to questions surrounding power and control between users.

The positioning of users, although enacted through design as a mode, is also seen in the roles users are able to adopt. In 'Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design', Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) describe the contrasting roles of the actor and the goal which were applied to the analysis to describe a relationship between users on the Facebook site. Similarly Goffman (as cited in Kress & Leeuwen, 2001) developed a participation framework to denote the three required roles in terms of the different modes of participation in a communicative event viz. principal, author, and animator. The principal is the person or institution whose position is initially established; the author is the person who then selects the sentiments that are to be expressed and the words to be encoded; and finally the animator is the person who delivers or constitutes these choices into existence. These roles can be simultaneously actuated through one person and this is useful in defining the roles and positioning of users in relation to one another. Users are simultaneously actors and goals in that the use of the service enables one to be the recipient of information disseminated to a collective network (goal) as well as being able to share information with the collective network (actor). Furthermore, the role of actor is not limited to one action as actors in the Facebook service are involved in all three roles of principal, author, and animator to at least some degree. As the principal, the user is constituted by the Profile page in that the user adopts a defined existence on the site through the provision of the

Profile page and Facebook account. As author, the user selects information in the form of thoughts, images and a host of other modes, to share with the network. Finally, as the animator the user produces (as described by Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001 or 2006) through the dissemination of information which is realised and enacted at a 'site' of animation such as the 'share' button. Positioning then extends beyond the arrangement of visual elements and encompasses the very use of Facebook, even if not all features of the service are employed. Creating a Profile page, or 'signing up', positions the user as a principal, one that occupies a role that serves in the maintenance of the system. This system in turn is based on a series of communicative events and moments of exchange that combine to ultimately define and construct the Facebook experience. Although the roles are not experienced as such, all of these roles are enacted or 'facilitated' by the Facebook service itself and consequently a degree of power emerges.

Not all instances of positioning the user in Facebook is a result of a deliberate action taken by the user. The suggestions component is an example where the positioning is not enacted primarily through the user. The suggestions component – as described in the analysis – provides users with 'Friend' suggestions, most likely by the use of an algorithmic process which identifies suggestions based on existing connections. Although the user must have a number of Friends from which to draw a sample of possible suggestions, it is the Facebook algorithm that presents specific suggestions to the user. The presentation of these suggestions result in the positioning of one user in relation to another where there previously might not have been such a positioning. Although the indirect relationship would have existed independently of the suggestion, by presenting that user as a possible connection, Facebook constitutes that person in the mind of another user. The user, in acknowledging this suggestion by either accepting the suggestion or refusing it, is presented with an alternative subject positioned as a Facebook user and consequently as principal, author, and animator.

Users of the Facebook service thus adopt roles and positions relative to each other which have no real meaning other than the meaning that is constituted within the actual domain itself. This positioning of the user forms part of a set of processes that ultimately creates a subjectivity which exists separate to and in tandem with the principal subjectivity of the user. This alternative subjectivity is informed through a combination of processes that takes place entirely within the service. Updating one's status, for example, provides information that is interred with a collection of previous updates. User's 'Friends' are able to access this 'stream' of posts and discern an

understanding of that user. Whether this understanding reflects the one that is created in reality, independent of the site and where that user is able to interact with other subjects in normative social situations, is unknown.

## **Presence and Visibility**

Although not strictly a mode, positioning plays an influential role in constituting Facebook and the Facebook experience. In discussing positioning, it becomes essential to address the effect positioning and structural elements have on the presence and visibility of users as, ultimately, these contribute to an overall visual experience and affect the emergence of a set of relations between users.

Apart from the Home page where users can access the 'Feed' of information provided by its networks, the Profile page permits users to share information by adding it to their profile, which other users can then read. Unlike the Feed, the information on the Profile page is not bound to a specific post that ultimately 'disappears' as a result of the addition of new posts; instead it remains visible on the user's profile. Users consequently have a far greater degree of control over this information in that they are able to not only select what they wish to share, but also what types of information to make visible or not. Users can select, for example, to remove their relationship status from their profiles all together so that that information is invisible. This feature reflects a conscious awareness of the distinction between information provided for others, and information for oneself. The Profile page is an identity project in that users are encouraged – even if not directly – to construct a representation of themselves for others. The nature of the Facebook service lends itself to anonymity because the typical means of establishing identification cannot be readily applied in a virtual environment. The absence of a physical presence means that users are not able to engage the tools of evaluating others that they might use in meeting people face-to-face. This is not to say that these means of evaluation are always reliable or even accurate, but they do constitute a 'methodology' that has become social practice. Verbal face-to-face conversation permits a degree of control and agency that is not so easily accessed in the virtual environment and consequently alternative ways of establishing rapport and trust between users is required. Although the Profile page has been present since Facebook's inception, it can be construed as a response to the original problem of addressing the establishment of this rapport. Since the primary aim of Facebook is to facilitate the sharing of information and increased connectivity, a similar environment of mutual trust and rapport needs to be established. The Profile page addresses this by providing a 'face' to an

otherwise unidentified user. Although no user is forced into constructing a detailed and accurate representation, doing so undoubtedly affects the way that user is perceived, which in turn affects their ability to connect with other users and ultimately 'benefit' from using the service. A cost-benefit economy then begins to emerge where the cost of constructing a Profile page with information about the user ultimately works in the realisation of the benefit of improved connectivity and greater access to information. The emphasis around control and privacy begins to depict an environment that prioritises information and **constructs** it as the commodity that social transactions are centred around. The greater impact of this construction will be discussed further on, but it is useful to the present discussion to identify the relationship information has with presence and visibility. Information as the established commodity of the Facebook service is transferred and shared between users, but this transfer is only achievable where existing connections between users are present. This highlights a tension that exists in the Facebook service between 'quantity vs. quality'. Relaxed controls might mean that information is more easily transferred and shared, but this might in turn affect the quality of the information transferred as well as the frequency with which users decide to share their information with others. The more control users have over their privacy settings and with whom they wish to share their information is reflected in the second Principle of the Facebook Principles and structurally reflected in the privacy and control settings on the Facebook platform itself. If we permit our understanding of Facebook to extend beyond that of an Internet-based service and see it as a fully functioning social system, we can begin to identify the ways in which Facebook, through the establishment of its principles and settings for privacy, constructs and maintains information as a valued commodity that ultimately sustains the service itself.

Apart from the construction of information as a commodity the Profile page, as a representation of users, captures that user's subjectivity. I have already asserted that the Profile page resembles an identity project that serves in the creation of an environment where the "free flow of information" is promoted, one that is mirrored in the Principles. In addition to this, the subjectivity of the user is embedded in the profile as a 'snapshot' of that subject. The Profile page is not determinate, but typically the 'factual' information that is provided is rooted in reality and to a large degree remains fixed. Biographical information, for example, exists independently of Facebook and although users are able to remove their birthday from their Profile page – or even change it to another date if they so wish – doing so does not affect the birth date itself and essentially renders it worthless.

Another Facebook 'feature' that captures users' subjectivity is the status updates or 'posts' because they provide the principal means through which users are able to share information with others. The text box containing the words "what's on your mind?" was presented in the analysis as it is one of the only instances containing a direct appeal to users by invoking their subjectivity through the use of a possessive pronoun. 'Your mind?' acts as a signifier to users that the question is personal and requires subjective engagement despite the fact that it appears in precisely the same format for all users. Apart from eliciting a personal, subjective thought or reflection, the text box has an ability to constitute users as real in the Facebook domain by taking that thought, or reflection, and 'publishing' it for others to see. This process of publication is similar to the processes of production and distribution that Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) describe in the realisation of discourse as social practice. The status update not only reflects the user's presence on the domain, but also represents an instance of that person's subjectivity because the process of updating one's status requires users to reflect on their own subjectivity, invoke their agency and, ultimately, disseminate that instance with others. Again the user is constituted as principal, author and animator in the production of a communicative event (Kress & Leeuwen, 2001). Notifications too, in this regard, act as communicative events in that they represent a history of events that have transpired in the domain. Subjects are constituted as authors and readers and, to a large extent, the simultaneous roles adopted by users in 'Facebook practice' encompass the fundamental equality that is asserted in the Principles. Whether it is experienced as such, however, is debatable. The equality the principles make reference to can thus be reread as an equality of roles and perhaps more importantly, as an equality that constitutes balance in those roles. Although Facebook asserts a "person's" ability to control what information they share with others, *not* sharing information results in an asymmetrical distribution of roles that constitutes that user as a reader and not a reader-author, which ultimately affects the distribution of information and power. In order to benefit from the Facebook service and access the control and power it provides, users must invest in an ethos of sharing that serves to subtly rebalance this distribution of power.

The chat function provides another example where this form of power is manifested. The chat function is perhaps the most simplistic, and consequently most explicit, example that clearly encapsulates the tension existing between access and visibility. When users opt to go 'offline' they essentially deactivate the application and prevent other users from seeing their presence on the site. The consequence of this, however, is that other users in the network are no longer visible and accessible through the application. As a binary system where users can either be 'online' or 'offline',

the control over visibility and presence is based in the choice itself. The immediate access to others provided through the chat application is only possible if the user permits the same degree of access. Power here is carefully controlled and an equitable balance is maintained at all times.

## **Dimensionality**

Dimensionality can be construed as by-product of elements on the site, as opposed to a separate element on its own. Essentially, dimensionality is created through visual effects, structural elements and the distinction between the background and foreground on the site. Dimensionality here refers to the tension that exists between 3D and 2D elements. 'Physically', the site is constituted in two dimensions as it has length and width, but no depth. However, by using certain visual effects and elements, Facebook realises depth in certain structural elements that in turn create the effect of 3D. The 'share' button can once again be used as an example, this time to illustrate how a visual element can be interpreted as a thematic representation. The Facebook site is principally two dimensional in nature and is primarily populated with two dimensional objects and elements such as 'flat' text, shapes etc. The 'share' button, however, is an example of one of the few elements that has been modified to resemble a three-dimensional object. Stylistically, the priority is the identifying relationship between the button and the Facebook logo and identity. The addition of a thin, horizontal line at the top of this button creates a subtle three-dimensional effect that results in a communicated emphasis to the user. Apart from the apparent benefit this emphasis provides, in that focused attention on the button and the function it performs may increase its use, the subtle three-dimensional effect raises an interesting question regarding the purpose or need for three-dimensionality in Facebook.

Facebook is a virtual setting and operates as such in that, regardless of the type of device used to view the site, it is always realised in a digital format and is intended to be so done. However, even though the site is virtual in nature and operation, there is a strong relationship between this virtual 'world' and what we typically perceive as reality. Users are able, for example, to share photos with their Friends and most often will add a 'profile picture' to create a more holistic representation of their identity. Facebook profile pictures are also used as 'avatars', small thumbnails that appear adjacent to the user's name whenever that user share's a piece of information or adds a comment to another post etc. The term 'avatar' is not unique to Facebook and is often used on Internet sites in reference to small graphics that typically aid in differentiating users from one another. The Oxford

English dictionary defines avatar as “an incarnation, embodiment, or manifestation of a person or idea”, and this definition encompasses the role of the profile picture perfectly. Unlike other computer-generated environments that permit a choice from a pre-defined selection of graphics or images, Facebook adopts the user’s profile picture and creates a ‘thumbnail’ version that is then used as an identifying image for all subsequent instances of interaction. Although the functionality of the ‘thumbnail’ or avatar is evident in that it aids in quickly discerning users from one another, there is an additional layer of meaning invoked which is particularly poignant when considered in relation to the tension that exists between virtual and real. Facebook is undoubtedly virtual in nature and this is indisputable when considering the principles that outline the establishment of material physicality. That is not to say, however, that existing in a virtual dimension or setting has no meaning or power over physical reality as we know it. Indeed, Facebook is designed as a tool to be used in the service of creating and maintaining connections as well as the sharing of information that transcends dimensionality and is relevant in both virtual and real contexts. As a result of this, it becomes imperative that the service not only draws upon reality in creating a profile and forming connections between users, but that it maintains a strong bond between the virtual environment in which it is constituted and the extended real world. The use of photos can be partly interpreted as an attempt to maintain this relationship that ultimately ensures the continued use and survival of the service. Photos – although strictly two dimensional – represent instances of reality in that they depict a moment in time often used to represent an experience or ‘body’ of memories. Apart from their role in representing the user graphically (profile picture), users are able to upload photos from their personal computers or directly from their mobile phones and share them with their extended Facebook network. What ensues are strong and stable connections between real experiences realised in photos that are then translated and converted into a digital format and stored in a virtual setting. The interspersing of photos and virtual elements throughout the Facebook site, binds these two dimensions into one ‘virtual reality’ that is no longer perceived as separate or independent of the world users live in. A problem ensues, however, in that photos as representations of reality are constituted in a virtual mode and although their ‘realness’ is emphasised using elements such as the white border that recalls those often used with printed photos, there is a sense in which the translation of physical to virtual loses an element of what constitutes reality in the first place, namely, physical materiality.



## Signs and Symbols

Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) claim that, in the age of digitisation, modes become one at a level of representation. One can argue that this is evident on Facebook where structure, colour and navigation are used throughout the site in the service of realising Facebook's objectives and are thus difficult to separate from their collective actuation. This is particularly poignant when considering the 'signs' and symbols used throughout the site. Although these 'signs' are generally referred to as icons in computer-generated environments, there is some degree of inconsistency between the computing and linguistic definitions of this term. Linguistically – in terms of semiotics – icon refers to a sign whose form directly represents the thing it signifies" (Levine & Scollon, 2004, p.11). This differs somewhat from the computing definition where icon refers to "small representative images that link one domain of a computer to another that became the basis for hyperlinks between computers" (Burnett & Marshall, 2003, p. 206). The computing definition of an icon focuses on the functional attributes or purpose the icon performs, whereas the linguistic definition's emphasis is on the signifying qualities of the icon that then establish a relationship between the icon and the object it signifies.

Icons in computer-generated environments are primarily performative in that they are created and used in the service of a specific function that almost certainly requires some form of action from the user. In this regard icons (referring to the computing term) can be interpreted as communicative events in that they communicate their purpose to users and elicit a response from them. These instances of communication can be further reduced based on their function and, certainly on Facebook, draw upon an established association or identity. In the analysis, I discussed the association that Facebook develops between its corporate identity and 'home' by displaying a small grey icon in the shape of a house when users hover over the icon. Although the appearance of the home seeks to establish an association between the Facebook logo and the Home page, embedded in this is an existing association between the 'Home' page as the central page of the site and the small icon depicting a house. In order for users to understand the appearance of the house icon as an indication that the Facebook icon redirects them to the Home page, they have to have already established the association between the shape of the house itself and its role as an icon for the Home page.

Addressing such an association may appear simplistic or even irrelevant to a discussion on signs and symbols in the Facebook domain. However, the instantiation of the 'house icon' reflects the

strong link between reality and virtual reality that is core to the Facebook service. The iconography for the Home page draws on reality by depicting the structural form of a house – however stereotypical – in order to convey a universal message to users. Facebook's "one world" assertion presented in the Principles bears particular significance here in that icons are perhaps viewed as more effective in conveying a universal message to users that language would be. This is reified by the recent changes Facebook undertook in January of 2010 in that notifications, messages and Friend requests were all converted from text into icons and placed adjacent to the Facebook logo in the Blue Navigation Bar thus reducing the number of 'text links' to various pages on the site.

Icons operating as links also serve in maintaining the system of categorisation adopted on the service. Throughout the site, icons are used to invoke associations, either created by Facebook or independently of it, to promote user-ship and interaction with the platform. Sites of engagement are often differentiated from the rest of the site through visual changes. The visual change is itself representative of change – or agency – in that it signals to the user a point at which he or she is able to act. Hovering over the Facebook icon reveals a small grey house that not only functions to create an association between the Facebook logo and the 'Home page', but also communicates to the user a point at which that user is able to take an action that will result in some form of change. In the case of links, this 'change' is in actual fact an indication of a point of access to another page or element of the service. A system of association is used to classify not only structural elements of the site, but those elements that users are able to interact with and those that permit further access. Icons and buttons have no real intrinsic meaning but rather draw on associations in order to communicate a specific function to users. Because of this absence of intrinsic, physical meaning, these graphic elements are able to combine the objects they represent with the function they perform and once again fuse the concepts of material reality and the virtual domain.

Photos, as discussed, play an important role in combining material reality with that of the virtual in the minds of users. In addition to this, photos constitute an entire 'application' on the Facebook service that extends beyond the simple addition of photos to a person's profile. Users can sort photos into albums (similar to the normative system of organising photos) and can add captions to aid others users in contextualising the photos. What is of particular interest, however, is the process of tagging. Although not employed by all users, tagging is symbolic in its process as well as significant to questions surrounding agency. When 'tagging' a person in a photo, the user clicks on that person's face adding a white box around the face and displaying a text box that the user then

interacts with to either select the Facebook Friend they wish to tag (provided that person is using the service) or to input the name of the person. Once 'tagged', this is published to the network, appearing in both the user and tagged user's News Feed. The box around the person's face that appears during the process of tagging, functions to identify who has been selected. Although users are able to select other objects or parts of the photo (and this is often used for comedic purposes), the objective is the association of that photo with a user. Tagging then encapsulates an important process of authoring that requires the naming of another user and establishment of a connection between a representation of material reality and a virtual identity embodied through the Facebook profile. Users can be tagged without consent and although they may remove the tag upon their next log-in or remove the photo application all together, the initial act of tagging – of being named – is enacted by another user acting as an author and inherent in this act is a considerable degree of power. The boxing off of the user's face is symbolic of the subsequent locus of control that the author subsumes and although the tagging can be later reversed, the act of authoring another subject cannot. The result of this process challenges the understanding of Facebook as an individual identity project in that the scope of authorship extends beyond that of the individual subject to include those in the Facebook network.

### ***Virtuality and Ideology***

The discussion has up until this point sought to illustrate the ways in which Facebook employs various visual and structural elements in the service of realising key functional goals, but in the creation of a general Facebook experience. Colour is employed in aiding the user to associate various features of the site with the overarching identity of Facebook. As a result, colour is controlled in that its application - resulting in a differentiation of sorts - serves in performing a specific function viz. the association with the Facebook identity.

An understanding of these features in relation to a set of functions and objectives then emerges. This research began with the assumption that various structural and visual features of the Facebook domain were discursively of interest because they were purposively designed to perform certain functions and these various visual elements serve to realise a host of functions. What must not be overlooked, however, is that despite a plethora of interactive capabilities and functions, Facebook has in its principles (and indeed throughout the site) identified specific goals that its service seeks to attain viz. sharing information and connecting users. As a result, all modes and structural elements

can be said to constitute the realisation of a core objective that can ultimately be understood as an underlying ideology that dictates and prescribes social action in the Facebook domain.

Ideology then, constituted through design, becomes the 'blue-print' that ultimately guides the users' experience and maintains the status quo that in turn governs the domain. This ideology is founded on the most fundamental principle that governs the Facebook experience, namely user's ability to interact with the site. It is the interactivity of the site that ultimately facilitates the experience of the user that culminates in a sense of agency that is then actuated. Although users will join the site for a host of reasons, the opening statement when navigating to the home page is **"Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life"**. In essence the domain constructs itself as a tool in the hands of users, not as an entity that controls or dictates the direction or choice available to users, but merely aids them in the process of realising a goal that is in itself constructed as emanating from the user. All the elements and features of the site serve in facilitating user-ship and it is user-ship itself that is based in the ability to interact with the platform. Conceptually, it is important to understand that the service's power or ability to realise its full potential in the hands of the user stems from the degree of interaction that occurs between the platform and user. The interface represents the degree of synthesis between user and system and the efficacy of the system in realising its goals is directly contingent on the interface's ability to recognize and understand the user in relation to this system.

If we therefore acknowledge the challenge that Facebook faces, we gain a greater understanding with regards to the way in which this challenge affects its choices and ultimately the users that employ the service. Interactivity in a virtual setting is permissible only through the manipulation of elements that essentially constitute signs. Mauss (as cited in Merrin, 2005) described a set of social relations that was predicated on the concept of reciprocation. In addition to this, these social relations emerged in environments or settings where subjects directly engaged one another. Typically a social exchange of this variety would draw upon a range of senses. To 'give' an object to another subject would require speech, eye contact, physical gestures and a host of other communicative actions that aid in the constitution of discourse as social practice. The Facebook domain – set in a virtual world – cannot draw upon the same scope of communicative acts and consequently the intensity and authenticity of the social exchange is questionable. The exchange presented by Mauss is one that has typified social interactions for centuries and although there is a great degree of variation between cultures, time and localities; all have relied on physical or direct human contact to realise

communication and discourse in a manner that creates powerful and binding relations. Baudrillard seems to recognise this and much of his writing speaks to the profound changes that have occurred over recent years and allude to the immensity of the impact the Internet and modern technological devices have had on the way we communicate the discourses and social relations these consequently constitute. Mauss noted that the exchange of 'the gift' culminated not only in a strong set of ties and relations but in a feeling of 'indebtedness' that although not explicitly stated, recalls the power relations that are embedded in discursive acts. Although modern technology has seemed to provide a way in which our normative communicative needs are met without the long presumed essential 'human' component, whether or not this technology is capable of interpreting all levels of meaning embedded in these acts is questionable and – presently – unexplored.

Baudrillard (1983) depicts a modern world plagued by a modern tyrannical force that disguises its agenda from society. Although somewhat pessimistic and even paranoid, Baudrillard challenges society to critically engage with these technologies and the consequences their entrenched adoption has on discourse and social relations. He describes the destruction of once powerful relationships between people based in time and direct confrontation resulting in the emergence of the sign that in turn promulgates its own consumption resulting in the emergence of the semiotised society. Facebook is a creation of this society and, in a way, a response to it. The drive toward individuation that pervades modern society is realised through the consumption of commodities as signs and in essence reifies Baudrillard's depiction of the post-modern world (Merrin, 2005). Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) allude to this in their description of the process of sign consumption as a product of the pressure applied on 'persons' to differentiate themselves through semiotic practices. Although Kress & van Leeuwen fail to explicate what they precisely mean by 'lifestyle', Baudrillard can again be employed here. Baudrillard describes a society that is totally immersed in a system governed by the sign and places the sign at the core of everyday life. As a result of the pervasiveness of the sign (as well as its replicability) 'reality' loses its power as a stimulus and instead subjects are enticed by the arrant nature of the sign and its production. Hyper-reality then results in the transformation of representation to simulation rendering reality impotent. A superficial review of Facebook would lead one to conclude that the site provides a virtual setting for everyday actions that are constituted as social practice. Gestures, commenting and sharing of information are facilitated using signs that represent these everyday actions. However, these signs permit greater control and access than is typically available and the signs themselves enable the user with accessibility and information that transcends what is typically possible. Facebook then does not seek to 'represent' reality, as doing so

would limit its scope and bind it to a domain that confines its possibilities and power. Rather, Facebook builds user-ship through simulation that is guised as reality. It does this by creating the strong tie to what we perceive as reality and ensuring that Facebook subjects are borne from pre-existing subjects. The maintenance of this relationship between reality and the hyper-reality does not follow Baudrillard's argument precisely, however, it is apparent that Facebook maintains this link in order to differentiate itself from other similar services that are completely based in hyper-reality. Regardless of the shift from reality to hyper-reality, Facebook subjects are borne from subjects that are first constituted in 'reality'.

The analysis has sought to debunk the Facebook service as a collection of signs and symbols (including text) that function collectively to represent time and a social network. Due to its foundation in sign this representation - as stated - becomes more than mere representation and gives way to simulation as described by the shift to hyper-reality. However, the ontological and epistemological foundations of Facebook are evident in its constant desire to draw upon reality. In a way, Facebook seeks to be more than it is capable of and is in bad faith in that it attempts to deny an aspect of its 'facticity', an element of itself that is determined and finite (Sartre, 1993). Facebook was founded in western society where science and 'fact' reign supreme as the methods of epistemic inquiry. As a result it seeks to constantly validate its existence, and therefore its goals - by reaffirming its presence in reality both by maintaining a link between Facebook subjects and real subjects as well as seeking to represent the structural and visual elements of a three-dimensional world. Although one might argue that if this were the case, why then does Facebook not seek to constitute itself solely in reality as to do so would surely aid in the realisation of its goals. In post-modern society there is a drive to differentiate and individuate subjects from one another and Facebook mimics this process by using structural, visual and interactive elements to collectively create a core identity that is embodied in the Facebook logo. The Facebook logo, as a sign, is Facebook as opposed to a representation of it, and as a result the domain is able to transcend the metaphysical and conceptual limitations that a basis in reality would provide. In essence, Facebook adopts 'the best of both worlds' approach by simultaneously drawing upon reality to validate its existence in the minds of users as well embracing its virtual nature and the accessibility and power this virtual scope provides. This simultaneous existence in both the virtual and real worlds represents a tension that is constantly negotiated and rebalanced as the service evolves. Facebook perpetually makes adjustments, adds new features and applications, and although these all perform specific functions that are communicated to users there are other more subversive functions that are often never

discerned. When these 'added elements' are viewed in conjunction with existing elements as a collection of discursive features that constitute social practice, it becomes evident that the addition of new features and elements ultimately add to the nexus that maintains order and control.

## Chapter 10

# CONCLUSION

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Technology has had a profound impact on post-modern societies and in particular, on the way we communicate with one another and the ways in which we mediate social relations (Cachia et al., 2007). Many of us have come to accept these changes without engaging with the ramifications and implications some of these technologies bring with them.

This research has sought to present Facebook from an alternative perspective, one not typically engaged with. Just as architecture, design and other modes have been identified as contributors to meaning, so too does their realisation in a virtual setting. The impact or importance of these modes is perhaps even more pronounced in virtual settings as they not only seek to communicate meaning but seek to establish a degree of rapport between reality and virtual domains. Facebook as a service has no foundation in material substance and as a result cannot be construed as physical. However, its lack of material substance has not prevented or hindered its adoption across the world and today it has over 400 million active users exceeding the population of the United States of America, the country in which it was founded (CNN, 2009; Facebook 2010). The rapid rate at which Facebook's user-base is growing reflects a need or desire for the commodity or product Facebook provides viz. the sharing of information and increased connectivity. However, despite its exponential growth and the rapid consumption of information, this does not affirm the information or authenticity of that information is real in the same way as it appears in reality.

Baudrillard's debunking of consumer culture and society sought to identify the discord that exists between what he termed hyper-reality and reality. He argued that the path currently set will not bring us any closer to realising the deep-seated emotional exchange which occurred in exchanges such as the gift, but rather serves in reinforcing the isolation that we so deeply fear. In many ways Facebook does realise the goals it establishes throughout the site, both in text and in other modes, but there is no means of evaluating the realisation of these goals other than through the identification of an exchange taking place. The fundamental schism seems to originate from the commoditisation of information and the reduction of social relationships such as friendship into a 'series' of information



that can be shared. Although Facebook is rooted in reality and remains very much dependent on it in order to maintain its position of 'authority' in the minds of its users, it has (and continues to do so) fundamentally altered our perception and approach to social interaction. Friendships that might previously have been constantly negotiated, assessed and developed are not represented visually through the form of a permanent, finite connection that requires a deliberate act on the part of the user to terminate and as a result positions users in binary positions which do not authentically reflect the subtle and true nature of social interaction.

Although this is by no means an exhaustive account of Facebook and its affect on social interaction and discourse, this research has sought to identify the presence of an ideology which reflects the ideology of post-modern consumer society that directs the course of technology and the subsequent consumption of that technology. Moreover, Facebook ultimately encapsulates this ideology and can be construed as a microcosm of the technologically dominated post-modern society where information has replaced capital as the primary commodity. As a result, Facebook's claim that it "helps you to share and connect with the people in your life" similar to the rest of the site's content, structure, and layout all seek to establish and maintain a set of relations between users that ultimately aids in the commoditisation - and subsequent consumption - of *information* and *sign*, and the establishment of **the** *hyper-reality*.

## Chapter 11

# REFLEXIVITY

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My Honours Research exposed me to a plethora of possibilities in conducting an analysis of the Facebook domain and the importance of adopting a critical stance when performing those analyses. Upon commencing my Masters research project, my overall aim was to expand on the research I had performed in my Honours research project as much of the results and conclusions I came to made me aware of the magnitude of the subject and the various ways in which Facebook can be used to debunk contemporary post-modern society.

The research agenda I adopted was always more concerned with piecing together an ideological understanding of Facebook and its relationship with modern forms of communication and social relations than an analysis of the ways people employ the service. Much of the research I reviewed for my Honours and Masters projects identified a clear absence of such research and contributed to the impetus for this research. Although the primary focus of the research project was always to perform an analysis in line with the requirements for a Masters degree, I realised early on that the methodology I had been exposed to up then would be inappropriate for the nature of enquiry I wished to conduct. I began searching for a method that would be able to fuse the structural and visual elements of the Facebook domain with the ideological aspects of the site (and social networks at large). Although multimodal discourse analysis is linguistic in its origins, its emphasis on interdisciplinary applications made it ideal for a critical psychological study and the investigation of ideology. It was, however, challenging to adopt a method I was unfamiliar with and more importantly to alter my stance regarding what constituted *meaning* and '*research*' and embrace the somewhat 'abstract' façade of the method. Further investigation and grappling with the approach Kress & van Leeuwen (2001, 2006) presented in their two works (as well as contributions to MDA made by other authors) resulted in a better understanding of the theoretical foundation of a method that tends to be either overlooked or misunderstood.

Apart from the theoretical foundation, the research contained herein represents a personal and academic journey that has provided constant challenge and self-critique. My Honours research confirmed many of my own suspicions and pre-conceived opinions regarding Facebook, but this research required a level of engagement and critique that I had previously been unexposed to. Much of what I have presented came unexpectedly from my analysis and, I believe, represents a strong commitment to the method and critical stance of the project.

Qualitative research is never wholly objective and as a result I must acknowledge the effect my own subjectivity and experience with Facebook has had on this research. In spite of my already critical stance toward the subject, my previous research motivated me to adopt a more critical and objective stance that as a researcher I had previously not achieved. The adoption of a new method and previous qualitative research made me more aware and concerned of the effects my own subjectivity would have on the analysis and overall research, and consequently this research represents the evolution of my journey as a qualitative researcher towards an acceptance and acknowledgment of my own subjectivity.

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